Transitions in early childhood classrooms are the “between” times from one scheduled activity to the next. Transitions that work well can make the scheduled activities cohesive and promote successful classroom management. Planned transitions rarely last for more than 5 minutes, but they help keep children on task and ready to move on to the next classroom activity. Successful strategies involve adult support in making the transitions and allowing the children to make choices.

Types of Transitions
There are several types of transition activities including musical, physical, creative, and cognitive.

- **Musical transitions** involve the use of music, songs, or instruments and are popular with young children.

- **Physical transitions** encourage children to use their bodies. Physical transition activities also often include creativity as children pretend and use movement as part of the fun.

- **Creative transitions** frequently involve “let’s pretend” activities that may also incorporate music or physical movement.

- **Cognitive transitions** may incorporate independent play with manipulatives, individual “reading,” or a circle time reading activity in which the teacher reads a book to the group.

Transitions are important for young children as they gear down or gear up for the next activity, and transitions normally precede important routines. For example, before rest time the teacher may read a book to the children and then play soft music to help the children relax and prepare for rest. Other examples include the use of transition activities to help children wind down from outdoor activities, gear down before going to lunch, or prepare for cleanup time. Alternating active and quieter activities helps make transitions proceed more smoothly.

Skilled teachers should have a tried and true collection of activities available, not only for planned transitions, but also for unplanned redirection of children as part of a suc-
cessful classroom management plan. Transitions should incorporate best practices that are extended to other classroom activities, including active learning and the selection of activities that interest the children.

**Tips for Successful Transitions**

Recognize transition times as distinct parts of the day. When planning and making daily preparations, include them in the routine as changes occur. **Know what transition activities will be used, and be ready in advance.** This will make it easier to keep active children busy and engaged rather than restless and bored.

- Plan free choice activities for the beginning and end of the day for children to do while waiting for others to arrive or to go home. Organization really helps with this. Have a designated area available for children to use when other areas are not open. This area should have a table for manipulatives and a floor space with mats and cushions for children who prefer to sit on the floor to play.

- Choose materials that relate to themes, seasons, or another topic that children are interested in at the time. Put out art and writing supplies, books, table toys, snap-blocks, and puzzles. **Vary the materials to keep quiet play fresh and interesting.**

- Prepare children for change. Give them advance warning that the activities they are involved in will soon end. Usually 3 to 5 minutes will allow enough time for children to finish what they are doing and to make the mental shift to another activity. **Help the children get ready for change by keeping them informed.** To assist in easing the transition, tell children where they are going next and what the activity will be.

- Keep verbal directions short, specific, and few in number. **Present directions in steps rather than all at once.** For example, children involved in an art activity may be asked first to put up their artwork, then to put away the materials, next to wash their hands, and finally to remove their smocks.

- Speak clearly and as softly as possible rather than raising your voice to talk over the sounds of active children. This will keep the noise level from rising. Children will become quieter in order to hear what you are saying instead of continuing to play.

- Try to keep the number of transitions to a minimum, but be prepared to move on to a new activity early if needed. Have a repertoire of fingerplays or activity songs that you know well enough to pull out on the spur of the moment to use when needed.

- Sounds can act as signals of transitions. A steady beat played on a drum may be used as an indicator that it is time to come together as a group in the circle area. A triangle may be used as the 5 minute warning that a transition is coming soon.
• Use music to help with transitions. Play a musical CD softly. A slow tempo creates a tranquil mood. Quiet music and calm conversations at lunch aid the transition from an active morning to a peaceful rest time. A CD of settling down movement activities can help children move from active to quiet play.

• Move as small a number of children as necessary at a time. To help with this, children may be allowed to leave and go to the next activity as they are ready rather than transitioning as a group. For example, to go to the nap area after lunch, let children leave when they finish eating, and invite them to select a book to take to their mats.

• To transition from outside or other boisterous play, establish a routine. Walk around so everyone can see you, and hold up one hand to signal that the end of play is coming soon. After 5 minutes, stand in one place and hold up two hands. Teach the children to “freeze” and hold their hands up as they see you or another child doing this. One by one everyone will become still and quiet. You can then motion towards the door or tell them what is going to happen next.

Make Transitions Fun
Transitions can be made into games for the children. When sending them to wash up for lunch or to get their coats to go outside, you may want to play a version of “Duck Duck Goose.” The child you tap is the next to get ready. Another game that adapts easily to this type of transition is “I Spy.” Describe the children one at a time: “I spy someone in a yellow shirt.” When the child described recognizes himself, it is his turn to go.

Young children love to pretend. If they need to move quietly, as when going down a hallway, turn it into a movement game. Pretend to be quiet little mice as you all slowly tiptoe along. Playing the game with the children – exaggerating the way you walk and your expressions – encourages their involvement in the fantasy.

Be creative. When the transition involves cleaning up, join in with the children and make up a simple clean-up song. This is so easy to do and can make the experience fun and keep young children focused on the task.

A cleaning up we go,
A cleaning up we go,
Hi-ho, the derry-o, a cleaning up we go.

A picking up we go,
A picking up we go,
Hi-ho, the derry-o, a picking up we go.

A putting away we go,
A putting away we go,
Hi-ho, the derry-o, a putting away we go.
Use puppets to communicate with children and to get their attention. To heighten interest, the puppet character may vary to relate to classroom activities. Or there may be a special puppet that children recognize as the messenger for important information and directions.

Be aware of the individual needs of the children. Toddlers or active older children may need more one-on-one involvement with transitions. It may be necessary to touch and address each child individually to get their attention and show them what to do. Others may only need a signal or a simple direction to know what is expected.

Create a Relaxed Atmosphere
When everyone is relaxed, children’s everyday flows more smoothly, and there is less need for adult intervention in behavior management situations. Everyone is more comfortable and secure in the early childhood classroom where changes in daily activities are anticipated and planned for.

Follow these steps to help create a relaxed classroom atmosphere:

- Vary the types of transitional activities used throughout the day.
- Be mindful of the developmental levels of the children.
- Avoid keeping unoccupied children waiting for long periods.
- Refrain from lining up young children.