



PARENT GUIDE • FLEXIBLE MOVEMENT

Transition Difficulties Behavior Blueprint™

Make the next step visible. Protect closure. Practice flexibility.

REGULATE FIRST. TEACH FLEXIBILITY SECOND.

What a transition is

A transition is any change in activity, place, person, expectation, routine, or plan. Difficulty transitioning is not automatically defiance. The child may need support with uncertainty, time perception, interrupted focus, sensory change, communication, executive function, anxiety, or body needs.

The goal: Help the child understand what is ending, protect a reasonable finish point, make the next step visible, and build flexible skills over time.

WHAT OFTEN MAKES IT HARD

Vague time, rushing, repeated verbal warnings, unfinished work, sudden change, too many words, or a difficult next environment.

WHAT OFTEN HELPS

Concrete time, one consistent cue, visuals, processing time, closure, two workable choices, a bridge, and calm practice.

Step 1: find the driver

UNCERTAINTY

The child may not know what is ending, what comes next, who will be there, how long it lasts, or what is expected.

INTERRUPTED FOCUS

Stopping a preferred, absorbing, or unfinished activity can feel like losing an important thought, plan, or completion.

TIME PERCEPTION

Words such as “soon” or “five minutes” may not make time concrete enough to prepare.

SENSORY CHANGE

Moving may mean new noise, light, crowds, clothing, movement, smells, people, or body demands.

ANXIETY OR LOSS OF CONTROL

Unexpected change, a difficult next activity, or a previous experience may make the transition feel unsafe.

BODY, LANGUAGE, OR EXECUTIVE NEEDS

Hunger, fatigue, pain, processing time, communication, and attention shifting can reduce capacity.

The hardest transitions and what makes them different:

Step 2: match the response

OVERLOAD OR MELTDOWN

Reduce words, demands, and sensory input.
Create safety, co-regulate, and wait for recovery before teaching.

GOAL-DIRECTED DELAY

Keep the boundary calm. Offer a controlled choice and reinforce the replacement—not escalation.

MISSING SKILL OR UNCERTAINTY

Show the sequence, make time visible, protect a finish point, and practice during calm moments.

BODY OR ENVIRONMENT BARRIER

Investigate pain, fatigue, hunger, sensory load, communication access, and whether the next setting is safe.

Remember: A tantrum can become a meltdown. If the child loses access to choices, language, or familiar skills, switch from boundary teaching to safety and co-regulation.

Step 3: map the 0-60 Journey™

	Checks the schedule, asks what is next, slows down, or becomes restless
	Bargains, repeats questions, protects materials, or needs more processing time
	Says no, hides, freezes, or cannot disengage from the current activity
	Yells, drops, pushes away, runs back, or loses familiar transition skills
	Shutdown, meltdown, aggression, or bolting; language and flexibility are limited
	Immediate danger or full loss of capacity

10-20 signals:

30-40 signals:

50-60 signals:

Steps 4-7: Preview–Close–Bridge–Regulate Plan™

04 • PREVIEW

Show what is ending and what comes next. Use one clear cue, a visual, and concrete time—not repeated verbal warnings.

05 • CLOSE

Save the work, photograph it, mark the page, take one last turn, or use a consistent goodbye ritual.

06 • BRIDGE

Offer two workable choices and carry an object, job, movement, song, or first step into the next activity.

07 • REGULATE

If capacity drops, use fewer words, reduce demands and stimulation, co-regulate, and save reflection for recovery.

Our preview cue and visual:

Our closure and bridge:

Step 8: teach what to do instead

CHECK WHAT COMES NEXT

Use a visual schedule, first-then card, object cue, picture, written list, or AAC—not speech alone.

ASK FOR A FINISH POINT

Teach “one more minute,” “save it,” “take a picture,” or “one last turn.”

CHOOSE HOW TO MOVE

Walk or hop, carry the schedule or transition object, go now or when the timer ends.

USE A BRIDGE

Carry a safe object, song, job, movement, or familiar ritual into the next activity.

NAME THE HARD PART

Teach “too loud,” “not finished,” “worried,” “need help,” or “need a break” with accessible communication.

PRACTICE PLAN B

Rehearse: “The plan changed. First breathe, then check the new plan.” Start with small changes.

The first skill we will teach:

How adults will respond when it is used:

Prevention plan

MAKE TIME VISIBLE

Use a visual timer, countdown strip, clock marker, song, or number of turns. Define “finished.”

USE PREDICTABLE CUES

Keep the words, visuals, and sequence consistent. Allow processing time after the cue.

PROTECT CLOSURE

Build save points and return plans so ending does not mean losing work, ideas, control, or connection.

ADJUST THE ENVIRONMENT

Reduce sensory load, rushing, unnecessary questions, and overlapping demands. Check the destination.

PRACTICE SMALL CHANGES

Rehearse Plan B during calm moments and celebrate recovery—not perfect flexibility.

WRITE & SHARE THE PLAN

Specify cues, visuals, finish points, choices, early signals, regulation supports, and adult responses.

Transition, preview, and concrete finish point:

Choice, bridge, and regulation support:

School planning: Put transition supports in writing. Identify the responsible adult, exact cue and visual, processing time, closure option, sensory supports, safe place, and response when capacity drops.

Safety note: Seek appropriate professional support when transitions involve dangerous aggression, bolting, self-injury, severe panic, pain, or major loss of daily functioning. This educational guide is not medical or legal advice.

Need an individualized plan? Schedule at calendly.com/optimizemylife/newclientintake or email mary@supportiveminds.us.

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