



## Supporting Regulation & Transitions

*Practical strategies to help students move through the day with predictability, safety, and success*

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### Why Transitions Are Hard

Transitions — moving between activities, environments, people, or expectations — are some of the most challenging moments in a student’s day.

Transitions often require students to:

- Stop something they enjoy
- Start something that feels difficult or uncertain
- Shift attention, expectations, and regulation quickly
- Manage sensory or emotional changes

For many students, especially those with anxiety, ADHD, autism, trauma histories, or executive functioning challenges, transitions can overwhelm the nervous system.

When regulation drops, behavior communicates distress, not defiance.

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### A Key Mindset Shift

Instead of asking:

“Why won’t they transition?”

We ask:

“What support does this student need to transition safely and successfully?”

Supporting transitions is about predictability, preparation, and regulation — not pressure.

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### Core Principles for Supporting Transitions

Effective transition support includes:

- Predictability – knowing what’s coming next
- Preparation – time and cues to get ready

- Regulation – support for the nervous system
  - Consistency – similar expectations across settings
  - Connection – feeling supported, not rushed
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## Before the Transition: Set the Student Up for Success

### 1. Preview What's Coming

Students benefit from knowing:

- What is ending
- What is coming next
- How long it will last
- What is expected of them

Examples:

- “In five minutes, we’ll clean up and line up for music.”
  - “After homework, we’ll have a short break.”
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### 2. Use Visual Supports

Visuals reduce anxiety and processing demands.

Helpful tools:

- Visual schedules
- Checklists
- First/Then boards
- Timers (visual or auditory)
- Written agendas

These supports are effective at home and school.

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### 3. Provide Warnings & Countdowns

Transitions are easier when students are not surprised.

Examples:

- “10 minutes left”
- “2 more problems”
- “One more turn”
- “When the timer ends, we’ll...”

Consistency matters more than perfection.

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## During the Transition: Support Regulation

### 4. Support the Nervous System

Some students need help regulating their bodies before they can comply.

Strategies may include:

- Movement (stretching, wall pushes, walking)
- Deep breathing or grounding
- Fidgets or sensory tools
- Calm, neutral adult tone

A regulated adult helps regulate the student.

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### 5. Reduce Language

During dysregulation, less language is more effective.

Try:

- Short, clear directions
- Visual cues instead of verbal reminders
- Calm statements instead of questions

Example:

Instead of “Why aren’t you lining up? We talked about this,”  
try “Shoes on. Line up. I’ll wait with you.”

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### 6. Offer Choices (When Possible)

Choices increase buy-in and reduce power struggles.

Examples:

- “Do you want to walk or skip to the next class?”
- “Would you like to clean up now or in one minute?”
- “Which pencil would you like to use first?”

Choices should be realistic and limited.

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## After the Transition: Reinforce & Reflect

### 7. Acknowledge Effort

Notice effort, not just compliance.

Examples:

- “That transition was hard, and you did it.”
- “You worked through that change — nice job.”
- “I noticed you used your breathing strategy.”

This builds confidence and skill over time.

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## 8. Reflect When Calm

Problem-solving happens after regulation, not during distress.

Helpful questions:

- “What made that transition tricky?”
- “What helped, even a little?”
- “What could we try next time?”

This supports skill-building rather than punishment.

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## Common Transition Supports That Work in Both Settings

- ✓ Visual schedules
  - ✓ Predictable routines
  - ✓ Timers and countdowns
  - ✓ Calm adult presence
  - ✓ Movement before and after transitions
  - ✓ Clear expectations
  - ✓ Consistent language across adults
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## When Transitions Continue to Be Challenging

Ongoing transition difficulties may signal:

- Anxiety or sensory overload
- Executive functioning needs
- Skill gaps
- A need for more proactive supports

In these cases, teams may consider:

- Adjusting routines or expectations

- Adding regulation supports
  - Conducting a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)
  - Updating a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)
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## A Gentle Reminder

Transitions are skills, not character traits.

With the right supports, students can learn to move through their day with greater confidence, predictability, and emotional safety.

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## Need Support?

THRIVE Student Support & Behavior Consulting partners with families and schools to:

- Identify why transitions are difficult
- Build proactive, practical supports
- Align strategies across home and school

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# THRIVE CALMING TECHNIQUES FOR PARENTS

Helping Children Calm Without More Demands



## Narrate Safety

"You're safe. I'm here for you."



## Offer Two Calm Choices

"Play with Legos or take a break in your room?"



## Permission Statements

"You can take a minute.  
It's okay to be upset."



## Stay Calm & Close

Gentle voice. Soft body. Give space.



## Quiet Support

"Point instead of talking. I'll start the first step."



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# THRIVE DE-ESCALATION STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS

## Supporting Students Without Escalation



### Narrate Safety

"You're safe. We'll figure this out later."



### Offer Low-Demand Choices

"Stay in your seat or  
take a hallway break?"



### Permission Statements

"You don't have to talk.  
You can take a minute."

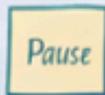


### Regulate with Your Body

Calm voice.

Give space.

Neutral face.



### Nonverbal Cues

Help card. Quiet signal or "Pause" note.



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# Supporting Regulation & Transitions

Practical ideas for helping students move between classes, tasks, and environments with fewer meltdowns and more predictability.

## 1. Co-Regulation Support Moves



### Cue the end gently

- 2 minute warning
- 5 more blocks/words
- "Let's do one more."



### Skip pointless countdowns

- Say "almost time to go."
- Use a timer (students can watch)



### Offer visual choice

- Sticker or cleaning up puzzle?"
- Puzzle first or the glue first?



### Have calm tool kit ready

- Sensory support
- Transition toy
- Reminder card



Transitions are hard.  
Rehearse, relate, and regulate  
with **compassion**.

## 2. Predictable Transition Supports



### Share proactive cues

- "What's next or "What's our first step?"
- Transition card
- First/Then visuals
- Dry erase schedule



### Create predictable routines

- Teach step-by-step using the same visuals.
- Practice each step calmly and frequently.



### Review sensory needs

- When in doubt, ask "What do you need?"
- Ear covers? Gum? Quiet break? Squeeze ball?



### Plan movement time

- Fine motor
- Gross motor
- Transition objects



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