

## RESPIRE TIP



### COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR MANAGING TRANSITIONS

As we begin the month of May and celebrate Speech & Hearing awareness month, it is fitting to discuss the power of communication and your child. In this three-part series of Respite Tips, we will review the theme of communication and transitions.

Transition time can bring forth anxiety and concern, for both parent and child, as the term “transition” invariably means change is on its way. Anger, anxiety, sadness, and/or stress may accompany the response you receive from your child when you are communicating about change in routine, environment or activity.

Young children, older children and grown-ups too, enjoy and find comfort in the predictability of routines. Consistent daily routines are important contributors to healthy development. When children are resistant to change, expectancy and demand for routine may become so rigid that a child’s opportunity for learning and experience becomes limited. Additionally, this rigidity can have an adverse effect on the daily functioning of the other members in the family.

When communicating to children about transitions and change, think about these conversations and exchanges of information as routines themselves. Consider the following features of such a conversation:

- Create comfortable seating in a quiet environment where you can have your child’s undivided attention.
- Is your child a visual learner? Do pictures help? Do you already use social stories or visual schedules in other communication routines? Can these strategies be adapted to help you explain changes in routine?
- Encourage your child to express themselves in the exchange as an active partner (if they do not voluntarily do so). Offer choices.

- Should your child respond strongly and/or negatively, remember to keep in mind your goal for the conversation – this is not the time to correct language, volume, tone, or behavior. If your child is in a highly emotional state, he/she is not in a state of learning readiness. Those features of self-expression should be worked on during a neutral time when your child is calm and focused.

Finally, consider the need to vary your communication approach, depending on the type of transition. For example, think about your child’s reaction to changes in routine or scheduled activities and the information he/she needs for transitions that occur:

- 1) On an annual basis – changing of the seasons; summer vacation to school and school to summer vacation; Christmas break; March break etc.
- 2) On an inconsistent or unpredictable basis – winter storm cancellations; statutory holidays; illness
- 3) As part of a regular daily schedule – transitioning between activities; transitioning between environments (e.g. home to school); transitioning between care providers
- 4) Major transitions – from preschool to elementary school (then to junior high, high school, post-secondary education, employment); moving

Your child’s needs for communication strategies and/or programs for smooth transitions may be consistent over time, or they may change as your child develops. The need for intervention, guidance, support, or structured strategies may also vary depending on the type of transition you are facing. Spontaneous or unpredictable changes in routine can be among the more challenging transitions that parents face. Ideas for planning to cope with unpredicted changes in scheduled routines will be shared in another Respite Tip in this series.

*This article was prepared by Julie St-Pierre, a speech-language pathologist with Atlantic Clinic for Communication Disorders, in Halifax. Julie was a respite care provider for seven years and continues to provide support to families.*

*This Respite Tip has been brought to you by the Nova Scotia Partnership on Respite, Family Health, and Well-Being. Information on the Respite Partnership and this and other Respite Tips can be found at: <http://disability.novascotia.ca/content/nova-scotia-respite-partnership>*

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