



PDA Transition Support Planning

For teachers, aides, and school wellbeing staff

Transitions are among the highest-demand moments in a PDA child's school day. This guide helps school staff map and plan support for transitions across the school day — reducing the anxiety and friction that so often lead to escalation.

Why Transitions Are Hard in PDA

- Transitions are imposed — not chosen
- They involve moving from a known, controlled situation to an unknown one
- The ending of a preferred activity is a significant loss
- New environments bring new demands and new uncertainty
- Multiple transitions in a day create cumulative demand fatigue

Mapping Transitions in the School Day

Transitions to assess for each student

- Arrival (entering the school / classroom)
- Between lessons or subjects
- Moving between buildings or spaces
- Lunch and recess (unstructured time)
- Returning from lunch/recess to class
- End of day / dismissal
- Any specialist sessions (art, PE, music, library)
- Unexpected schedule changes

For Each Transition — Ask These Questions

- How much warning is given before this transition?
- Who manages this transition — is it consistent?
- Is there a low-demand settling period after the transition?
- What does the student experience at the end of the preceding activity?
- What is the demand level in the environment they're moving into?

Strategies for Difficult Transitions



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Arrival

- Meet the student at a consistent, agreed point (not the main entrance if overwhelming)
- Low-demand greeting — genuine but brief
- A brief preferred activity to settle before class

Between Lessons

- Give a 5-minute warning before the lesson ends
- Allow the student to finish their thought or reach a natural pause
- A familiar, consistent person walks with them if possible

Return from Unstructured Time

- Brief outdoor or sensory discharge before going back in
- A consistent entry routine that the student knows
- Lower demands in the first 10 minutes back in class

Unexpected Changes

- Give as much notice as possible — even one minute is better than none
- "I know this wasn't the plan — here's what's happening..."
- Acknowledge the difficulty: "That's a surprise — I know that can be hard."

Transition support is preventative

The time invested in transition support — consistent people, advance notice, low-demand settling periods — pays off in significantly reduced meltdowns and escalations across the whole school day. It is not a luxury for one student. It is high-impact early intervention.