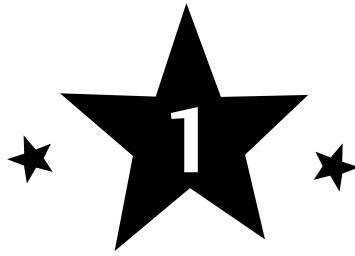


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Sensory Cues in Routine Changes

The frazzled teachers at the *What's Happening Now? Child Care Center* were at their wits' end. They were in their fifth transition of the morning, with children scattered all over the room. Some were in the bathroom, others in the hall, and only two children had made it to the large group area for music. The teachers had asked the children to put their scissors in the box, pick up their scraps, push in their chairs, wash their hands, and sit on the carpet until everyone had finished with clean-up. Few were listening and most were not remembering all those directions! The teachers were seriously considering having outdoor play all day, to avoid these stressful transitions.

What can be done to transition or move children smoothly from one activity to another? What can be done to end the stress and confusion everyone feels during changes in routines and activities? When trying to get the attention of a large group of children, the use of cues is practical. Use simple verbal directions, along with sensory cues, such as signal cards, musical instruments, or puppets, to prompt children's movement to the next activity.

Consider the guidelines below when signaling children that one activity is over and another is about to begin.

Guidelines

1. The teachers at *What's Happening Now?* need to check their schedule and eliminate any unnecessary transitions. Often, children become scattered and disorganized because there are too many disruptions during the day.
2. Limit the number of directions you give to children. The younger the child is, the fewer the directions. For example, "Get your cup and napkin and sit at the table." Children will remember the first or last direction in a

series, but cannot always process what's said in between.

3. Foreshadow children's movement from one activity to another by giving them a warning. A warning is often a verbal prompt, such as "You have three more minutes before clean-up." Sensory cues, auditory or visual, let children know one activity is ending or another one is beginning.
4. Combine verbal directions with other sensory cues, such as visual and auditory. Help children who are young or distractible by physically guiding them through the transition. Use a variety of sensory cues to signal a change in the routine.

Authors' Note: Some people believe that prompting children with a cue is conditioning. However, throughout life it is natural for us to follow cues. If we didn't have alarm clocks, we wouldn't get to work on time. Signs and traffic lights signal us for safety's sake. Likewise, children also need prompts. Use a variety of cues to avoid the conditioning effect and make changing activities more interesting. Let's explore how we can make routine changes using sensory cues.

Activities

Verbal Tricks of the Trade

Materials/Preparation

- ★ No materials required.

Procedure

Your verbal cues are children's time clocks. It is important to use your voice to get children's attention and guide them through routine changes. Speak clearly and loudly enough so that all children can hear you (no shouting, please).

Tell them to stop, look, and listen. Once you have their attention, tell children the past, present, and future. "We have all had a fun time playing this morning and enjoyed the toys in the room. Now it is time to put these toys away and move on to another fun activity (breakfast, outdoor play or group time)." Make positive statements that encourage even the most noncompliant children to feel as if they are an important part of clean-up. For example, chant, "Everyone join the clean-up crew and before you know it we'll be all through."

Reinforce children as they are working and when they have completed tasks. Specifically tell them their appropriate actions. Positive words, thumbs up, or a handshake builds self-esteem. You benefit by having more willing helpers for the next routine change.

Variations

Another form of auditory "magic" for routine changes is to say, "I need some help. I can't remember what we are supposed to be doing now. Can anyone help me?" When the children tell you, thank them. If the children don't know what they should be doing, hopefully other staff will play along with your game and come to the rescue. If you are alone in the room, go into a brief problem-solving technique with the children such as, "Well, let's see, you came on the bus and had free play time. Are any of you hungry? So maybe it's time to have breakfast. What do you think?"

Body Language

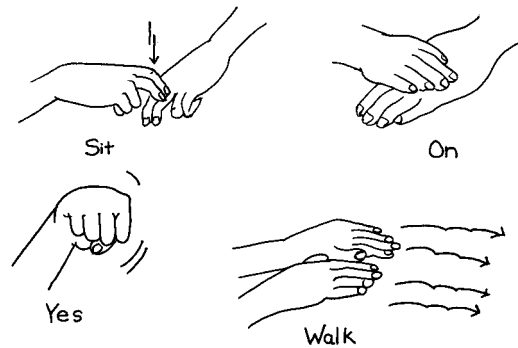
Materials/Preparation

- ★ No materials required.

Procedure

Using a hand gesture, making eye contact, smiling, moving close, or touching a child's shoulder are forms of nonverbal communication. All play a part in making routine changes and guiding children through transitions. Our goal for routine changes is to have children accomplish them as independently as possible. However, we know that some children require more assistance than others to make this change. So how do we assist children with routine changes?

After the auditory or visual cue, ask children to look at you before you explain what will happen next. For most children, it is essential to establish eye contact if they are to follow the cue. Eye contact, a gesture, or a facial expression can nonverbally communicate to the child to move along with the transition. Identify and teach common gestures, such as a beckon to come, finger to the lips for quiet, nodding your head for yes, and hand up for stop. Teach children American Sign Language words, for example:



As you give sensory cues for routine change, move in closer to a group of children. This will prompt some to begin the transition. Tactilely guide a child by putting your arm around his shoulders. This makes it easier for some children to accomplish the transition. Also, your participation in the routine change, for example, putting toys on the shelf, provides a model for children to follow. Working with a child to pick up demonstrates a spirit of cooperation. It encourages everyone to move on to the next activity.

Nonverbal communication is also necessary between teaching staff. Convey messages across the room or playground with facial expressions and head and hand gestures. Messages such as, "I need help! Move over to that group of children. Go inside and check on Francisco," can all be conveyed nonverbally. Learn to recognize these universal signals and use them with children and adults in your center as you make routine changes.

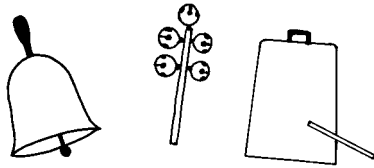
Listen to the Bells

Materials/Preparation

- ★ Jingle bells, school bell, cowbell, etc.

Procedure

Ring bells is a pleasant way to announce impending routine changes. Be creative! Choosing different bells for different routines makes it easier for children to distinguish the change they are about to make. Ring jingle bells to symbolize music time and a cowbell to signal play time outdoors. Play a chord or a tune on tone bells (similar to a xylophone) to indicate clean-up time or changing from one learning center to another. Ring a soft tinkling bell as children tiptoe to their cots.



Ring the bell to gently remind the children that one activity is ending and another is about to begin. Always ring the bell at least twice, first giving them a warning to finish up what they are doing and then to signal clean-up time.

Remember to include verbal cues with the bells when you introduce new ones. Children need to understand your expectations. One or two directions at a time is ample. As they become familiar with the sound (or sounds), they will usually respond automatically without the necessity of an extensive explanation.

Never use the fire alarm bell (or any bell that sounds similar) as an auditory cue for a routine change. That should have its own distinct sound to alert the children to danger.

Variations

Sing this song as you ring the bell. It's sung to the tune of "Mary Had a Little Lamb."

Ring, ring, ring, ring, ring the bell.

Ring it loud. Ring it clear.

To tell the children in the room,

That clean-up time is here.

Then, as the children finish cleaning have a teacher positioned in the next meeting area (lunch table, group area, etc.) and sing this verse of the song:

Sing, sing, sing, sing, sing with me.

Sing out loud. Sing out clear.

To tell the children in the room,

That lunch time now is here (or near).

Shake, Rattle, and Drum

Materials/Preparation

- ★ Drum, tambourine, triangle, etc.

Procedure

Different instruments set different moods in your environment. Instruments are auditory cues. Play a drum slowly or fast and steady. A tambourine is usually played fast and with intensity. A triangle sounds quiet and tinkly. Play instruments to announce the impending change. Continue playing the instrument as children clean up. As you walk throughout the room tapping your drum, chant positive remarks to the children who are working hard. The more specific you are, the better the children will understand why they are being praised: " (child's name) , I like the way you're cleaning up. You're putting all the blocks away. (child's name) , you clean the books up very nicely."

Use a variety of instruments for different routine changes. As children are walking down the hall to the bathroom, play the triangle to encourage quiet tiptoe feet. As children are moving from free choice to group time, tap the tambourine as you lead them to the sitting area. Play the same instrument for a specific routine change so children associate that sound with a particular transition.

Variations

If you don't have access to rhythm instruments, use kitchen utensils, such as a foil pie tin tapped with a spoon or shakers made of covered margarine tubs with uncooked macaroni inside.

Use other handmade instruments. Appendix B includes directions for making Rhythm Sticks (page 85) and Streamers (page 85). A coffee can with a lid makes a good drum. Cover it with colored or printed contact adhesive paper. Wave streamers to cheer the clean-up crew along.

Tickling the Ivories

Materials/Preparation

- ★ Piano
- ★ Sheet music if you don't know the music from memory.

Procedure

Playing tunes on the piano definitely encourages children to smoothly engage in transitions. To announce a routine change with the piano, play a chord (the C chord is a good one: C-E-G-C) and then tell children the next activity. Also play the complete tune on a piano to make it easy for all to hear and sing the melody.

Play an upbeat song to get children motivated and in the right mood to clean up in a timely manner. Try the following song using a lively beat. (Look for this same tune in later chapters.)

CLEANUP TIME

Clean up time. Clean up time. Everyone it's clean up time. I see (child's name), I see _____, I see _____ cleaning up.

Variations

Another song similar to the one above is to the tune "London Bridge is Falling Down." You can find the notes and melody to this song in a children's songbook.

Everyone, it's clean up time, clean up time, clean up time.

Everyone, it's clean up time. Let's all clean up.

Moovooove It!

Materials/Preparation

- ★ No materials required.

Optional: Animal sound cylinders, tape recorder and cassette tape of animal sounds, or stuffed animals whose sound is triggered by touch.

Procedure

"Moo," "oink," "quack," and "meow" are all animal sounds preschool children enjoy making and identifying. Associate various transitions with different animal sounds. Make these sounds on your own or use toys or tape recorders to make them. See N' Say toys (animal sound versions) work well and so do animal sound cylinders. The cylinders come in many animal sounds such as a lamb, cow, duck, or horse. A small stuffed animal that makes a sound as you cup it in your hands is especially magical and interesting to the children. To start, give verbal reminders with the animal sounds. Some transition examples are listed below.

- ★ Moo like a cow to move the children to group time.
- ★ Have a rooster crow to announce the time to get up from rest.
- ★ Play a pig sound to transition the children to breakfast, lunch, or snack.
- ★ Make the sound of a dog to remind the children that it will soon be time to go outside and play.
- ★ Meow like a cat to indicate the transition to the children's cots.

Soon children will recall the transition simply with the animal sound. Walk around the room or playground making animal sounds or accompany this auditory cue with a visual cue. Turn off the lights and then make or play the sound.

Variations

Music boxes are other auditory cues that give you the same results as animal sound cylinders. Use a music box of a child sleeping to indicate rest time. Find one with an outdoor scene on it to remind children to get ready to go outside. A box with toys on it that plays rousing music for cleaning up the room is another good choice. Decorative music boxes act as both auditory and visual reinforcement for routine changes.