



Transitions without Tears

Do you struggle with getting your child to day care or preschool on time? Are bedtimes and bath times an endless battle in your house? Is “NO” your child’s new favorite word?

Why is all of this so hard?

Many young children have a hard time transitioning from one activity or state of being to another. This is often a root cause for the tears you may hear as you put your child down for a nap - or for that matter, as your child wakes up again. This also explains why many children cry as they separate from their parents in day care, but settle down happily a few minutes later. It's not the nap or the separation that's the issue, but rather the challenge of crossing the threshold from one state to another. Change is hard for many children to master – even if it's a good change!

When you understand this about your child, you can find ways to help ease your child through difficult transitions – and one of the best tools you can use is music. A simple song will help ease the transition into bath times, or bedtimes. A song about trains might be just the thing to help your child chug along with you out the door and on your way.

Why it works

Music works so well because children love rituals. Rituals help carry a child through a transition by creating a sense of inevitability and predictability around the unfolding sequence of events. This can be very comforting to a young child! When you sing the same song to your child every time you get her ready for bedtime, you create a bedtime ritual that's hard to resist.

Young children are very process-oriented and not very goal-oriented. In other words, your young child may happily splash in puddles, and not care a bit about being clean for the rest of the day. The process of splashing is much more real to your child than the goal of being clean. You can use this to your advantage by making music the process that engages your child through their transition. Try singing a lullaby to your child every time you say goodnight, and see if your child drifts peacefully into sleep. Or try singing your own “pick up” song whenever you pick up toys. You may find your child picking up willingly - and eventually even singing along.

(more on back)

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How to do it

Singing to your child is easy, even if you don't think you're musical. Just put your own words to any familiar song. It doesn't have to be great music – it's the sound of your voice singing that's magic to your child. Even more magical is if you use your child's own name, and sing about your own child's rituals. Here are some simple examples to get you started:

(To the tune of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star)

Time to put away your toys,
Time to put away your toys.
Please don't make a lot of noise
As we put away the toys,
Time to put away your toys
Time to put away your toys

(To the tune of Frere Jacques)

I see [your child's name], I see [child's name]
Yes, I do, yes I do.
[Child's name] put her toys away, [child's name] put her toys away.
How about you? How about you?

(To the tune of This Train is Bound for Glory)

This train is going to the market (or insert your own destination),
This train is going to the market,
This train is going to the market,
Come on get on board! (Or [your child's name] get on board)

(Train songs are always great to help your child get moving and out the door with you. Just keep singing "chugga chug chug..." as you hold your child's hand and chug out the door together!)

Need more songs? Consider joining a music class with your child. Not only will you have interactive fun together in class, but you'll get extra play ideas to use all through the week. Happy singing!