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Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities

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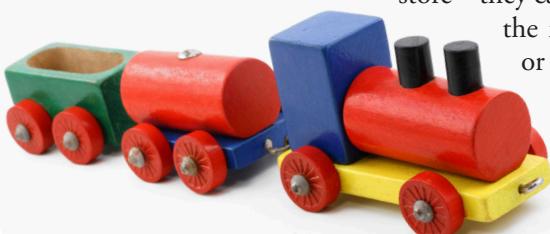
10 Calming Techniques & Transition Strategies for Kids

If you've worked with kids for awhile, you know all about transitions and transition strategies and calming techniques during transitions...those little magic tricks that creative teachers, therapists, caregivers, and others have invented to help prevent tantrums and promote self-regulation when kids need to move from one activity to another throughout the day. I won't say that these strategies are 100% fail-proof, but I do know from experience that it feels really good to be prepared with a handful of ideas that can help ward off a potential tantrum when the going gets tough. Here are some of my favorites...

1. Make it clear to the child how much longer the activity will last. Try using a visual timer. Bring the child's attention to it when you set it and keep referring to it throughout the activity (e.g. "Look! We have 2 minutes left!") Offer a set number of turns with the activity before moving on and then count them out clearly (e.g. 10 more pushes on the swing, 3 more turns with the toy, etc.). Give lots of warnings for how long the child has left to participate in the activity.

2. Make sure the child knows and understands what is coming next and give her something to look forward to! Picture schedules are perfect for this. Set up a visual schedule showing the child several steps of her day (e.g. get dressed, brush teeth, eat breakfast, go to school) either in pictures or, if your child can read, using words. This Visual Schedule Planner app may be a good option too. Try to alternate between non-preferred and preferred activities so that the child sees that she has positive things to look forward to throughout the day. As much as you possibly can, stick to your schedule like glue until it's an easy routine for the child. If a child is struggling a great deal with transitions, try breaking it down into even simpler terms with a "First...Then" chart, showing that first the child must complete one activity before moving on to a more preferred activity. You can find pictures of common everyday activities on sites like do2Learn, or if you have access to Boardmaker, you can find pretty much any picture under the sun.

3. Use a transition object or toy. Sometimes, bringing a favorite object along for the transition is comforting for a child. Frequently, when I pick kids up to bring them to therapy groups, they will be playing with a favorite toy (cars, trains, blocks). Whenever I can, I allow the child to bring one of whatever they're playing with along for the walk to therapy. We make a special place for them to "park" their toys during therapy and they can pick them up when they're finished. This also works for the bathroom – they can park their toy in the hallway outside and pick it up on their way back to class. I use this one with my kids at home on a daily basis. If they're playing with Lego bricks and we have to run to the store – they can bring one Lego guy or vehicle along for the ride. Easy! Try using a special toy, book, or other object that can be designated for use only on the bus ride to/from school if these are a difficult times of day. Sometimes this is all it takes!



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4. Practice the art of distraction. I learned this calming technique from a true master of childcare...my grandmother! Staring into the face of a potential tantrum because your therapy session is over and it's time to go back to class, or because you're at the park and it's time to go home? Out come the bubbles! Yep...throw a little container of bubbles in your purse, pocket, or therapy bag and you're in business. Can your kiddo stomp bubbles all the way to the car? Can they run through the bubbles to get all the way to the therapy room? Singing also tends to work wonders for distraction during transitions as well as movement activities that get you from point A to point B (e.g. "Can we hop all the way to the sink to wash our hands?"). I often hold my kids under their arms and "jump" them all the way to therapy (or the bathroom, or wherever else we need to go)! Or, we'll play catch with a bean bag or bat a balloon back and forth as we move through the hallway. Lots of smiles and lots of successful transitions! Have a child who struggles with transitioning in the hallway with his class? Bring along a big building block or other object to use as an obstacle. Place it on the floor and have the whole line of kids jump over it as they pass by – bring it back to the front of the line and repeat! Bring along a jump rope and have the entire line limbo under it or jump over it as they walk by.

5. Make a sensory "pit stop". At our school, we have a mini trampoline strategically located in the hallway – actually, we just have no space so there's nowhere else to keep it :) ... but it actually works to our advantage. When kids are transitioning to the gym or to and from the bathroom or even to get on the bus at the end of the day, they can stop off with an adult to jump for a few minutes. This could work with any sensory activity. If there's a place in the hallway to leave a tactile bin, and a few resistance bands, this is a great opportunity for kids to do a little "sensory drive-by" as they transition in the halls and it's usually a good motivator too! Try these heavy work activities for small spaces.

6. Have a consistent way of signaling that an activity is over. Try singing a consistent song that lets kids know that a transition is coming – like a "Line Up" song or a "Clean Up" song. In some classrooms where I work, the teacher simply puts on a CD with kids music to let everyone know that it's time to transition to the carpet for circle time. In other classrooms, they turn off the lights to show that one activity is ending and a new one is beginning. If there is a specific kiddo who is struggling with transitions, make it his job to turn off the lights, turn on the music, or lead the song. All of these ideas can work at home too! Sing or play a specific song to show that it's time to get dressed in the morning or time to get in the bath.

8. Don't rush it. If you know that a child is going to struggle with an upcoming transition, give him/her (and yourself) LOTS of extra time to make the switch from one activity to another. Most of these transition strategies take time, so make sure you leave yourself plenty of wiggle room. If you make it to your destination or get to the next activity early (hooray for you!), refer back to #7 (waiting!).

9. Practice makes perfect. Social stories are great for easing anxiety over new or difficult transitions. They allow kids to mentally "practice" the transition in a calm, non-threatening way. We use these in the classroom and then send the same social stories home for families to read in the evenings too. Patience is key. Kids aren't going to learn to make new transitions unless they have consistent practice – sometimes for many days (or weeks).

7. Make "wait" time less miserable and confusing. Wait time: every kid's worst nightmare. It's boring, it's confusing, and it's usually kind of abstract. Kids hate it. My best advice is to minimize the amount of time kids spend waiting for the next activity to begin (see #10 regarding being prepared and organized!). On the flip side, sometimes having to wait is inevitable. Why not give kids some tools to make it a little more bearable? One of my favorite speech therapists used to sing the "Waiting Song" (a comforting little tune she made up herself) to kids who were getting restless all lined up at the door waiting to go out into the hallway. Movement breaks and sensory activities like the ones discussed in #5 are also great time fillers. Fidget toys and simple hands-on tasks (e.g. beads for stringing, adapted books, this cool fine motor threading activity, and this fun fine motor task) are also great tools for keeping little hands busy during downtime, whether you're at home, at school, at the doctor's office, or sitting at a table at a restaurant. Visual prompts are also essential for wait times. Again, a visual timer can work wonders to show that the waiting is almost over! Or try a simple visual cue or sign that says "STOP" or "WAIT".

10. Consistency, structure, and organization are key! Be prepared! Lulls in the action, waiting time, lots of shuffling around of papers/materials are all great ways to lose kids' attention and invite problem behaviors. The teachers and parents I've seen who have the best success with transitions are the most structured and consistent. Try to make the same set of transitions at the same times throughout the day as much as possible. This creates a comfortable backdrop for introducing new activities and transitions when necessary. Clearly defined spaces and work areas also help (e.g. try a specific area for homework at home, or a specific place where the child can find his clothes and get dressed in the morning). In the classroom, our teachers use tape marks to show kids where to line up and have defined spaces and activities for kids who finish snacktime early (e.g. puzzles or books on the carpet, sensory table, etc.).

TRY THIS AT HOME

- Play a bowling game together. Stack some blocks or containers. Then roll a ball and knock them over. Repeat!
- Make snow angels in the snow together. When you come back in the house make snow angels inside on the floor. Then stand up and get them to try and call them jumping jacks!
- Look through some family pictures together. Talk about what is happening in the pictures. Ask your child who the people are in the picture.
- Sort a deck of cards together, by numbers or by colors or by shapes/suits.
- Before bedtime, read your child a story and then ask them "what was the best part of your day and what was the worst part of your day?" Share yours also!

For more great parenting tips and activities, visit the preschool activity calendar at www.albertahealthservices.ca

Five Little Snowmen

(Tune-Five Little Monkeys)

Five little snowmen
riding on the sled,
One fell off
and bumped his head,
I called Frosty
and Frosty said..
"No more snowmen riding
on that sled!"

Four little
snowmen...
etc.



Why the Canadian Physical Activity and 24-Hour Movement Guidelines are Important

The CSEP is pleased to feature the release of the world's first 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for children in their early years. We think of young children as busy, but that doesn't mean they're active. Many Canadian kids are getting too little physical activity, and spending too much time in front of screens, which is particularly harmful before age five. As young children grow and develop, they need to work towards high levels of physical activity, low levels of sedentary behaviour and sufficient sleep each day to be healthy — they need to Move, Sleep and Sit the right amounts. The new Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for the Early Years (ages 0-4) show there is an important relationship between how much sleep, sedentary behaviour and physical activity children get in a 24-hour period. All types of movement matter, and a balance is best for health.

- **30 min.** Amount of tummy time recommended for infants not yet mobile.
- **60 min.** Amount of energetic play recommended for preschoolers every day.
- **60 min.** Recommended screen time limit for toddlers and preschoolers over 2 years old.

PRESCHOOLERS (3-4 YEARS)

MOVE - At least 180 minutes spent in a variety of physical activities spread throughout the day, of which at least 60 minutes is energetic play—more is better!

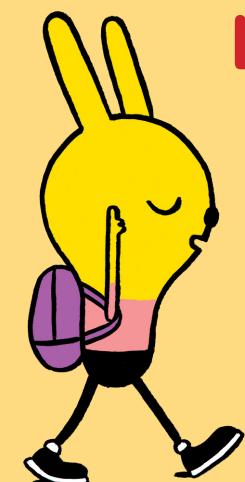
SLEEP - 10 to 13 hours of good-quality sleep, which may include a nap, with consistent bedtimes and wake-up times.

SIT - Not being restrained for more than 1 hour at a time (e.g., in a stroller or car seat) or sitting for extended periods. Sedentary screen time should be no more than 1 hour—less is better. When sedentary, engaging in pursuits such as reading and storytelling with a caregiver is encouraged.

Replacing time restrained or sedentary screen time with additional energetic play, and trading indoor for outdoor time, while preserving sufficient sleep, can provide greater health benefits.

These Guidelines may be appropriate for young children with a disability or medical condition; however, a health professional should be consulted for additional guidance. To encourage healthy growth and development, young children should receive support from their parents and caregivers that allows for an active lifestyle with a daily balance of physical activities, sedentary behaviours, and sleep.

For more information visit: <https://www.participation.com>



Let's NOODLE-DO

NOODLE-DO is a structured play date with activities that are geared to 3-5 year olds. But the target is really YOU, the parent! Learn about the importance of "serve and return" interactions between caregivers and children — the key to life-long learning and literacy. Since children learn through play, parents need to learn what kinds of play develop healthy, school-ready brains and bodies. Developed by several Early Childhood Coalitions, Big PLANS is pleased to offer this to our families. If you would like more information, contact us at info@bigplans.org or call 403-685-4229

15 MINUTES of FUN

Celebrating Literacy Day

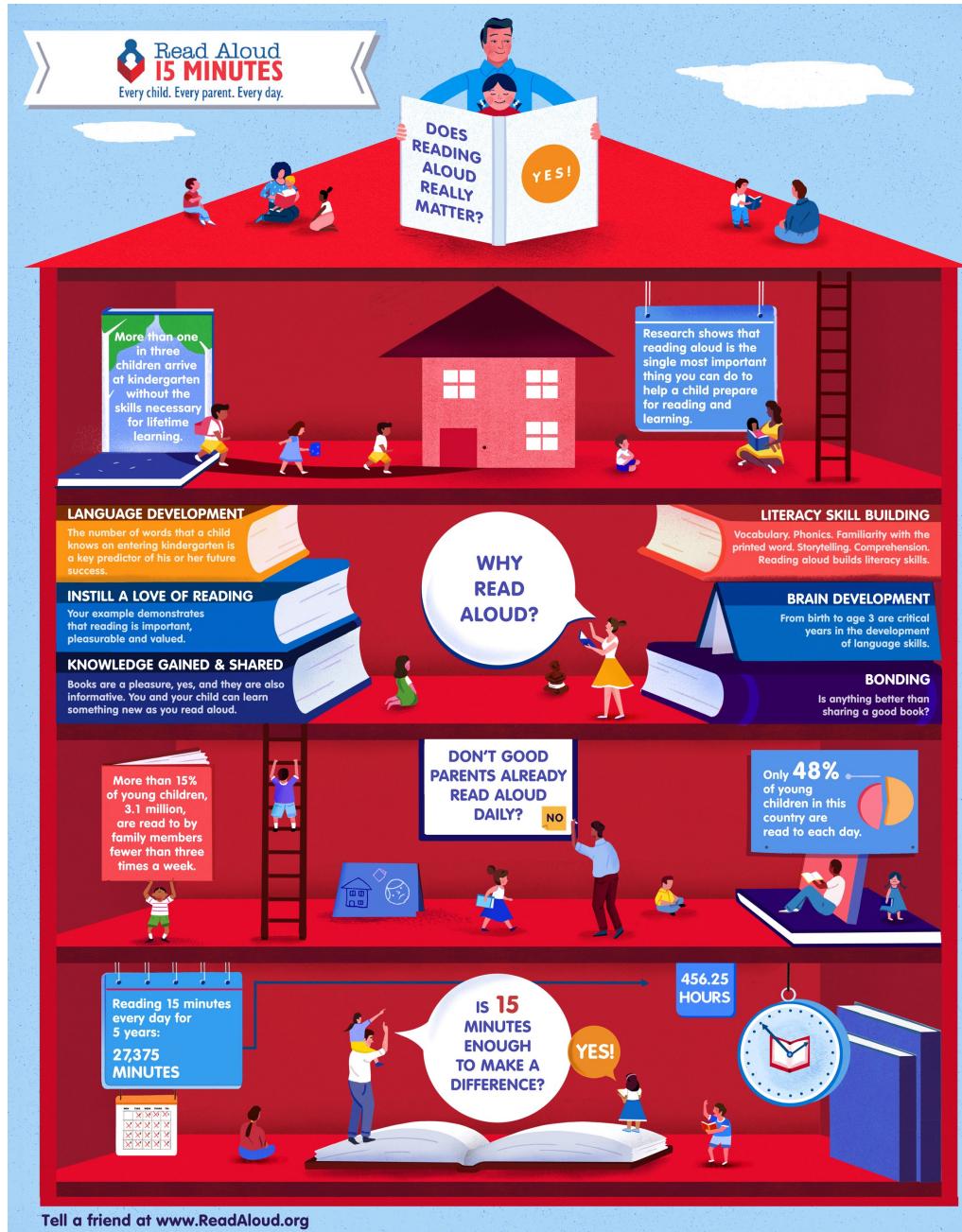
January 27th

ABC Life Literacy Canada encourages families to “Learn at play, every day.” Engaging in literacy activities as a family improves a child’s skills and also helps adults keep their skills sharp. Here are a few ideas to get your family started!

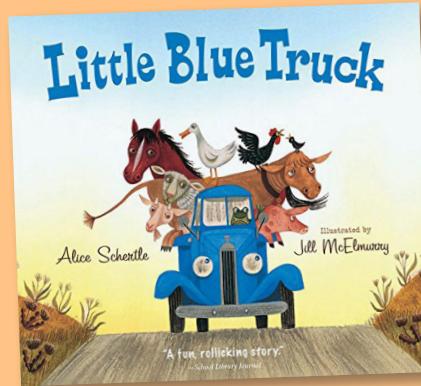
- **Play With Your Food:** Get toothpicks and small pieces of apple, cheese, grapes, or whatever snack you want (marshmallows, yum). Now build a house, tower or circle by attaching your snacks with toothpicks. Best part is you can eat it (not the toothpicks, of course)!
- **Favourite Food Find:** Create a grocery store scavenger hunt with your weekly shopping list. Maybe add a few special items you don’t get all the time for a special treat (and an extra challenge for scavengers).
- **Slumber Party Book Club:** Choose a book to read as a family, then watch the movie together in your PJs. Talk about what you liked from the book and the movie (and don’t forget, lots of popcorn).
- **Draw Me A Home:** Get large sheets of paper and draw the rooms of your dream home. Add in the rooms you always wanted (trampoline in your bedroom and pool in the basement!) Get some of your favourite toys and play with them in the house.
- **Letter Model It:** With modeling clay, make the letters of your name using all the colours of the rainbow. See some ideas from Family Literacy Day Honourary Chair, Barbara Reid.
- **Favourite Family Food:** Write down how to make your favourite family meal. Share the recipe with your friends and family or make a video showing how to make the meal.

Download special Family Literacy Day activities from Family Literacy Day Honourary Chair, Barbara Reid!

<https://abclifeliteracy.ca/fld/activity-ideas>



Building Sound Awareness with Little Blue Truck



Helping children understand that words can be broken down into individual sounds is called sound awareness or “phonological awareness”. This is an essential skill that leads to better reading and writing later on. One of the first signs that your child is developing sound awareness is his recognition of rhymes – for example, knowing that the words “night” and “fight” sound the same at the end. You can use a strategy called “Listen... and Find One Like It” to help your child tune in to words that start (alliteration) or end (rhyme) with the same sound. Little Blue Truck is about a friendly blue truck who teaches a big dump truck about the importance of being kind. The entire story is told in rhyme, which makes it a great fit for the “Listen... and Find One Like It” strategy.

Learn how to use this book and this strategy by visiting the Book Nook: <http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Book-Nook/Little-Blue-Truck.aspx>