



# Why Transitions Are So Hard (and What Helps)

Leaving the park, turning off the tablet, switching from playtime to dinner, transitions are some of the most common meltdown triggers there are, and it can feel like they should be the easiest part of the day. Here's why they're often not, and what actually helps.

**"It's rarely the new activity they're resisting. It's the switch itself."**

## WHAT HELPS

- 1 Give a warning before the transition, not just at the moment of it.** "Five more minutes, then bath time."
- 2 Use a visual or timer they can see counting down.** Not just hear about.
- 3 Build in a bridge activity between the two things.** A short walk, a song, a specific transition phrase.
- 4 Let them finish a natural stopping point when possible.** Rather than cutting off mid-activity.

## IF IT STILL GOES HARD

- ☐ Don't scrap the transition because it was hard, the new activity still needs to happen, calmly and without extra negotiating.
- ☐ Debrief briefly once things settle: what made this one tough, what might help tomorrow.
- ☐ Notice which specific transitions are hardest (screen-off is common) and put extra support there first.

### TRY THIS

A simple two-warning system: "Two more minutes, then we clean up," followed by "One more minute," said calmly each time, at the same volume.

## BUILDING SMOOTHER TRANSITIONS OVER TIME

Keep a consistent routine and order for the transitions that repeat daily, predictability itself is calming.

Use the same visual schedule or timer every time, so the tool becomes familiar rather than novel.

Celebrate the smooth transitions out loud, not just the rocky ones, it reinforces what you want more of.

BxLight is designed by a BCBA for educational purposes only, and is not a substitute for individualized professional care — if you're working with a BCBA, therapist, or other provider, they know your child best.

© 2026 The Behavior Lighthouse LLC · behaviorlight.com