

BEHAVIOR · GRADES K–4

Transition Routines

Six routines that actually work

Why transitions matter

Research suggests primary teachers can lose up to 30 minutes per day to transitions — moving between activities, getting equipment out, lining up, settling. That's 2.5 hours per week. 100 hours per year. Wasted time. Good transitions don't have to be silent or military. They have to be PURPOSEFUL. The child knows what to do, where to go, and how long they have. The class moves as one body, not 28 individuals doing 28 things at different speeds.

Routine 1 — Carpet to desks

<p>The cue</p> <p>A consistent verbal or musical signal. 'When you hear the chime, freeze. Then I'll send you table by table.'</p>	<p>The expectation</p> <p>Walk (don't run). Push chair in if needed. Sit. Pick up pencil. Look at me.</p>
<p>The timing</p> <p>30 seconds maximum. Practise timing it. The class knows how long they have.</p>	<p>The praise</p> <p>'Table 3 was the fastest today. Quick AND quiet. Brilliant.' Specific, not effusive.</p>

Routine 2 — Activity to activity

<p>The 1-minute warning</p> <p>'You have one more minute on this. Then we move on.' Crucial for any child with autism, anxiety or working memory needs.</p>	<p>The cue</p> <p>Same signal every time. A clap pattern, a chime, a phrase. The brain learns it.</p>
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<p>The expectation</p> <p>Pencils down. Eyes on me. Listen for the next instruction.</p>	<p>Don't transition while talking</p> <p>Get them still and listening BEFORE you give the next instruction. Or it's just noise over noise.</p>
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Routine 3 — Tidying up

<p>The cue</p> <p>'In two minutes, we're tidying. Get ready.' Then: 'Tidying time. Three minutes on the clock.'</p>	<p>The expectation</p> <p>Everything goes back where it came from. No throwing. No abandoning. Each table is responsible for their area.</p>
<p>The trick</p> <p>Music helps. A specific 'tidy-up song' that lasts 3 minutes. When the song ends, tidy time is over. Keep the song the same all year.</p>	<p>The check</p> <p>Walk past each table. 'Looking great here. This area still has pens out.' Not a punishment — a noticing.</p>

Routine 4 — Lining up at the door

<p>The cue</p> <p>'When I say your table number, line up at the door.' One table at a time prevents stampedes.</p>	<p>The order</p> <p>Stand in single file, facing forward. Voice off. Hands and feet to self.</p>
<p>The line leader</p> <p>Rotate weekly. The leader sets the pace and is responsible for stopping at corners and crossings.</p>	<p>The wait</p> <p>We don't go through the door until the teacher says, even if the door is open. Stillness > impatience.</p>

Routine 5 — Coming in from break

<p>The settling</p> <p>Children come in, hang coats, sit down, take a sip of water. Quiet music can help reset energy.</p>	<p>The 5-minute reset</p> <p>Don't launch into hard maths the moment they come in. 5 minutes of low-cognitive activity (reading, drawing, journalling) settles bodies and brains.</p>
<p>The cue back to learning</p> <p>Same signal each time. Pause music. Phrase or chime. 'Pencils ready, eyes on me.'</p>	<p>Don't punish leftover energy</p> <p>Children come in from break excited. That's biologically expected, not bad behavior. Settle them; don't shame them.</p>



Routine 6 — End of day

<p>Build a packing routine</p> <p>Same order every day. Workbook in tray. Worksheet in book bag. Coat on. Sit on the carpet.</p>	<p>Reflect briefly</p> <p>30-60 seconds at the end. 'What was your favourite part of today?' or 'One thing you learned.' Bookends the day.</p>
<p>Dismiss in groups</p> <p>By table, by line, by collection person. Not all 28 at once.</p>	<p>Say goodbye to each child</p> <p>Eye contact. Name. 'Bye, Sam — see you tomorrow.' Tiny ritual, big impact for children with attachment or anxiety needs.</p>

