

# FOCUS

## on Early Childhood Mental Health



*Pennsylvania Key  
Early Childhood Mental  
Health Consultation  
Project  
717-213-2063  
[micwal@berksiu.org](mailto:micwal@berksiu.org)*

## Handling Transitions

Every day when his mother drops him off at child care, Sammy cries, and then when she comes to pick him up, he throws a tantrum because he doesn't want to stop playing with his friends and go home. Sammy's mother says he does the same thing at home: whenever she tells him it's time to do something else or go somewhere, he resists. Unlike some children who can easily go with the flow of whatever's happening, Sammy has a hard time with transitions and his resistance is disruptive and frustrating.

### The importance of routines:

Routines help make transitions easier. In addition, they:

- Play an important role in the development of young children and help children learn about normal human interaction
- Provide predictability and are comforting
- Reduce power struggles between caregivers and children

### Tips for helping children handle transitions from one activity to another:

- Create a ritual that the child can expect: at bedtime, brush teeth, read a story, sing a song, hug and kiss.
- When you leave your child, give him or her something to keep until you come back, such as a picture or other small object.
- Give advance warning: "You can finish playing your game and then it will be time for bed."
- Make transitions fun: for cleaning up toys before bed, sing a song: "This is the way we pick up toys."
- Let the child choose how to make the transition: "Do you want to play one more game before we get ready for bed?"
- Especially in a child care setting with lots of children, help children develop the skills they need to transition from one activity to another more quickly: putting on and taking off coats, lining up, cleaning up toys. Less time spent in waiting for everyone else might help decrease problem behaviors during transition times.

### Resources:

- "Helping Children Make Transition between Activities," What Works Brief #4, Center for the Emotional and Social Foundations of Early Learning; [www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel).
- "Helping Children Make Changes: Big and Small," ChildCareAware; [www.childcareaware.org](http://www.childcareaware.org)
- "Temperament Characteristics: Reaction to Change," Zero to Three; [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)
- "Transition Times," Family Communications (Mister Rogers' Neighborhood), [www.fci.org](http://www.fci.org)