

Transitions: First-Then & Visual Routine Guide

A quick guide for smoother transitions (leaving the park, bedtime, school drop-off, switching tasks).

Why transitions are hard

Transitions require the brain to stop one plan and start another. Stress, fatigue, and uncertainty make this harder.

- Children may resist even when they know what to do
- Rushing increases dysregulation
- Predictability reduces power struggles

First-Then formula

Say it once, show it visually if possible, and follow through calmly.

- First shoes, then car.
- First tidy, then story.
- First two minutes of work, then a break.

Tools that work

Choose 2-3 tools and use them consistently.

- Timer + 2-minute warning
- Transition object (small toy, photo, note)
- Choice of two: “Do you want to walk or hop to the door?”
- Visual schedule (pictures or simple words)

If it still melts down

Keep it safe and reduce language. The goal is regulation first.

- Stay close and calm; fewer words
- Repeat one line: “I’ll help you.”
- When calm returns, practice the transition again (briefly)

Educational content only. Not medical advice. If you have urgent safety concerns, contact local services or a qualified professional.