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Transition Tips Can Lead to Classroom Triumphs

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Whether you feel ready or not, the long days of summer are quickly dwindling. Just around the corner is the back-to-school frenzy; a period of time that is dreaded by some and celebrated by others (primarily parents). The transition from sleeping in, staying up late, and having few demands to a school routine, can be a challenge for any student – and even staff. As you head into the new school year, you may consider leveraging these behavioral strategies to ease the transition to set your students up for success.

Establish consistent routines

The beginning of the year is a fresh start and a great opportunity to establish consistent routines for your students. Whether this means using a picture or written schedule to alert them to the days' events, or being clear about the expected behaviors in the classroom, providing predictability is a great way to ease the minds of your anxious students. For some, knowing in advance the schedule or routine can provide a smoother transition between activities. A student may despise math, but knowing that recess is right after those dreaded math problems, can motivate them to push through and stay on track. Having an established system for turning in homework (e.g., a homework bin combined with a verbal reminder at the same time each day) can increase the likelihood that the student with poor executive functioning gets their assignments turned in. It's much harder to get everyone on board with a routine or systems change mid-year, so take the time to set them up now and reap the benefits all year long.

Use reinforcement to shape the behaviors you want to see

In the thick of the chaos of behavioral management, sometimes it's easy to forget the power of praise. No matter the age of your students, reinforcement is a tried and true way to increase the presence of positive behaviors. Decide in advance what positive behaviors you want to encourage for your students. Is it raising their hand to be called on? Using nice words towards each other? Remaining in their seat during work time? Start identifying and calling out these expected behaviors as you see them. Be precise with what specific behavior you are praising. "I love the way Johnny is working quietly at his desk" is clearer than "Nice working, Johnny". Now, not only does Johnny know what he did well, but his classmates know exactly what behavior is going to get your attention. Consider the use of other rewards and motivators beyond praise. Could a token system earn the class privileges or special treats? A general rule of thumb is to provide feedback on appropriate behaviors at least three (3) times more frequently than inappropriate behaviors.

Prepare for the unprepared

We know students show up each fall with potentially unknown situations or conditions that make it harder for them to learn. Some students will lack the supplies they need, others will be unable to focus due to hunger pains, or even poor sleep. Be equipped to address each individual child's needs as they arise. Your flexibility and a willingness to lean on your available resources will make the learning environment more manageable for everyone. One simple tip could include stockpiling extra supplies and snacks. The importance of spending one on one time with a struggling student can help identify the why behind the struggle. With this knowledge early in the year, you can identify and refer to appropriate services, such as counseling, to give your student the best chance of success.



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