



Occupational Therapy

Suggestions for Difficulty with Transition and Attention

Many children with sensory processing difficulties have difficulties with transitions and changes to routine. When a person does not perceive the information from the world (through eyes, ears, mouth, nose, skin, inner-ear, and muscles) correctly they feel very out of control and always on guard for the unexpected. Then a child will often try to control what he can since everything else is unpredictable to him. This can be by establishing routines, being manipulative, or being pokey (hard to get moving). A common problem is that a child does very well with a set schedule and routine but has a difficult time with new situations or transitions between activities or settings. The following are some suggestions that have helped other children transition better within a given environment:

- A child does better with a set schedule (same activities happen at the same time everyday or activities happen in the same sequence within a given week).
- To help a child to know what to expect next it helps to know how many activities are expected of him and when all activities will be completed. One of the best ways to assist this process is to provide a visual schedule. Some people use the words of the activity but pictures seem to work better for most children. Some people leave the schedule up each day others will have a child go over to the schedule after each activity is complete and have them remove the picture. The latter seems to help the child be ready to transition to the next activity much better.
- Especially point out any changes to the daily routine (field trip or activity). It can be helpful to also use “first _____, then _____”.
- Many children do well with a transition item. This should be an object the child can hold in their hand but that is not too interesting that it distracts them. Often squishy balls or carrying a water bottle can help if it is used each time a child transitions.
- Weighted objects are grounding and are great to use for attention during sit down tasks but are also good transition items as the weight is very grounding and helps with calming and body awareness. Weighted lap buddies, bean filled tube socks, halo weights, or a weighted vest to be held or worn for transition times (especially when walking in a busy hall or outside).

In addition to the structure of a day, some children will need more boundaries and structure within a given activity to help them attend and keep hands quiet. The following are ideas that have been used in classroom settings and have been beneficial:

- When needing to stand in a line, a child with sensory defensiveness does better being the line leader or being the last on the in line. This reduces unexpected touch from others.
- During circle time a child does better given boundaries of their “area” this can be done by using carpet squares, taped squares, or foam mats. Also placing a child at either end of the circle (near the teacher) can help with attention and keeps hands to self.
- Seating options to be considered: Cube chair, bean bags, or child size chair with weighted bean bag on lap. These all have helped keep some kiddos in their chair and can help improve attention to task.
- A quiet corner (beanbag in a reading nook, pillows under a table, small tent) can be a good strategy to use for a child that may become over-stimulated in an environment. This is not used as a time out but rather as a “safe place”. This is somewhere a child can go to re-group or to reduce sensory stimulation.

If you have any questions or comments, please call me at (309) 347-5164