

THE CALM PARENT'S CHEAT SHEET FOR TRANSITIONS

Simple, research-backed tools for strong-willed and ADHD-wired kids



1. Preview, Don't Surprise (But Adjust for Your Child)

Predictability builds safety—but too much notice can create anxiety.

- ✓ If your child gets anxious: give short notice (5 minutes).
 - ✓ If they need time to process: give 2 cues—one at 5 minutes, one when starting.
 - ✓ Use concrete signals: "when the song ends," "after this block," not "in 5 minutes."
 - ✓ Use the same transition language each time so it becomes familiar. Build in buffer time—if it should take 5 minutes, plan for 10.
- ➔ **Try: "Five minutes until we start cleaning up. Which toy do you want to finish first?"**

2. Anchor the Body Before the Brain (Regulate First, Then Redirect)

Words don't reach a dysregulated brain. Calm your child's body first.

- ✓ Use a 2-minute "Anchor Breath": inhale 4 counts, exhale 6 (blow out a candle).
- ✓ If your child resists breathing exercises:
 - Make it playful ("Let's blow slow-motion bubbles")
 - Use a stretch, fidget, or quiet moment side-by-side
- ✓ Your calm is contagious—co-regulation starts with you.

➡ **Try: "Let's calm our bodies first so our brains can listen."**

3. Validate, Don't Fix (Meet Emotion Before Logic)

Validation isn't agreement—it's acknowledgment.

- ✓ Use simple empathy: "You really didn't want to leave. That's hard."
- ✓ Avoid "but"—pause and let them feel seen.
- ✓ For kids who don't like words, offer proximity, eye contact, or gentle touch.
- ✓ Reflect calmly: "You're mad we have to go. It's okay to be mad."

➡ **Try: "Let's calm our bodies first so our brains can listen."**

4. Common Parenting Mistakes That Set You (and Your Child) Up to Fail

Giving up too soon

Parents often try a new approach for a few days, don't see instant progress, and assume it "doesn't work."

Instead: Choose one small strategy and commit to it for at least two weeks. The repetition builds safety — for both of you.

 Expecting calm without modeling calm.

It's hard to coach emotional regulation when you're running on fumes.

Instead: Practice your own "reset ritual" before you try to help your child regulate.

 Over-explaining or reasoning mid-meltdown.

When your child's lid is flipped, logic is useless.

Instead: Focus on helping them feel safe first using short, gentle phrases like "You're safe. I'm right here. We'll figure it out together."

 Setting goals too high (or trying to fix everything at once).

Parents often tackle every problem simultaneously and then collapse in exhaustion.

Instead: Pick *one* transition that's the hardest right now, and simplify your focus to that.

 Forgetting that progress is non-linear.

Even when you're doing everything "right," there will be off days.

Instead: Anticipate setbacks so they lose their power to derail you.

 Remember:

You don't need perfect patience or a complex plan. Just:

- One predictable cue
- One regulating moment
- One genuine reflection

Simple. Repeatable. Transformative.