

Southeastern PA School Age Child Care Project



Get Ready! Get Set! Go!

**A Systematic Approach to Managing a Successful Transition
from Summer Vacation to Fall by Roberta L. Newman**

The back-to-school season is a major time of transition for children and youth, families, after school program staff, and school staff. I like to use the old game mantra: “*Get Ready! Get Set! Go!*” as a framework for planning and carrying out transitions that work. Using this framework, this article contains transition tips to help after school staff facilitate the summer to fall transition with ease, comfort, confidence, and enthusiasm. It also includes a set of games to support a smooth transition from summer to fall.

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Breakthrough to Quality..... A series of articles and training resources from a national leader in out-of-school time.
by Roberta L. Newman
Article 13: Get Ready! Get Set! Go!

GET READY!

Take time to think about what you're transitioning from – the summer experience. Acknowledge what the summer has been like for you and the kids in your program. Ask some key questions as you reflect on the “state of summer” and the coming transition:

- What were the summer highlights for kids and families in your program? Participating in the program? Exploring the community? Special camps? Vacations and trips? Other?).
- Was summer difficult for some kids? Did some kids go unsupervised for the summer? Did they experience a summer of boredom, danger, or loneliness?
- Who are the kids that will be joining your program in the fall? What are they interested in? What are they good at? What kind of support and encouragement do they need? What are their families like?
- How have kids changed over the summer? Have much have they grown? Have they made new friends? Have they developed new interests, hobbies, or skills? Have things changed in their families?
- What changes are in store for children when they return to school? How will these changes affect children and/or your program?
- What changes are in store for children who are returning to your program? New staff? Different space? Less or more materials and equipment?
- How do kids feel about the coming fall changes? Excited? Anxious? Reluctant to participate in an after school program? Wishing summer wouldn't end?



Develop strategies for finding answers to these questions. Include selected questions in brief surveys of children and parents, telephone or on-site interviews with parents, informal conversations with children and family members, interviews with school personnel, and meetings with co-workers.

GET SET!

Use the information you collect from children, families, school and program staff, and your own knowledge and insights to set the stage for a successful transition. Here are some guidelines:

Reach out to families.....

- Create opportunities for children and families to share their summer experiences. Invite families to share photos, stories, and favorite summer activities. Use collected materials to create a "Summer Reflections" display.
- Create an attractive Parent Bulletin board highlighting important components of your program, expectations, and notifications of changes.
- Design a "Welcome to the Program" family newsletter and distribute it prior to opening.
- Post staff photos with brief bios highlighting knowledge and experience and quotes about what they like best about working with kids.
- Create nametags for staff to wear for at least the first week.
- Plan a fall family open house where parents can learn about your program.

Plan with kids in mind.....

- Schedule a regular time for "get to know you activities," sharing important news about the program, and relationship building. Incorporate the use of "fun" name tags for start up.
- Learn a variety of "Get to Know You Games" to build positive relationships among kids.
- Plan activities where children can share their summer experiences through games, journaling, drawing and painting, music and skits, etc.
- Develop activity plans that reflect new insights and information about kids' needs, interests, and skills.

Develop plans for:

- ◆ Working with kids to help shape program rules and limits and appropriate consequences.
- ◆ Instituting a mentoring system where experienced kids act as "buddies" to new kids.
- ◆ Involving kids in ongoing program planning and implementation once the program is underway (Leadership club? Suggestion boxes? Question of the week? Surveys?).
- ◆ Helping kids set personal goals for the coming months.

Coordinate with school personnel.....

- Coordinate children's dismissal from school and arrival at the program. Develop strategies for receiving children, taking attendance, and getting them engaged in experiences that provide varied opportunities for resting, relaxing, unwinding, eating, and/or chatting with friends as needed while they make the transition from school to after school. Avoid moving children immediately into highly structured activities, except in cases where individual children need directive support and guidance.
- Ask what you can do to support children's success at school.
- Learn about major learning themes for different grade levels. Consider reflecting these learning themes in your program environment.

Assess your program environment, schedule, and core experiences and make needed changes and adjustments for fall transition.....

- If you provide homework help, create a comfortable, attractive, well-equipped homework center that supports a variety of different learning styles.
- Assess the condition of all equipment and supplies; replenish, discard, or repair as needed.
- Reorganize and restock activity areas to reflect the new season and kids' new interests and abilities.
- Create reading areas and cozy corners for relaxing and unwinding from the school day.

GO!

Now you're ready for action. Remember that staff working directly with kids are key players in creating smooth transitions. Be sure all staff are prepared to connect with kids in the following positive ways from the first day:

- Greet each child with a friendly smile. Use children's names as soon as possible.
- Use name tags and play games to help children learn each other's names..
- Give a tour of the program environment. Review the schedule.
- Use effective techniques to get the attention of a group or prepare for a move to another area or activity.
- Express enthusiasm and excitement about program experiences. Invite kids to talk about things they like to do or want to learn.
- Talk with children about how they would like to be treated and invite suggestions about ways everyone can get along. Stress principles and values such as listening to the ideas and concerns of others, sharing, cooperating, showing respect, politeness, kindness, and patience.
- Be prepared with everything needed to launch or lead an activity or game. Use a step-by-step method for introducing new games such as
 - 1) Describe it.
 - 2) Demonstrate it.
 - 3) Ask for questions.
 - 4) Do it.
 - 5) Adapt it.



CONCLUSION

Whether transitions and changes are large or small, successful transitions require thoughtful reflection, assessment, and preparation; input from those who will be affected by the change; a systematic approach to implementation; active engagement of leaders; and lots of communication! Taking a systematic approach may be time consuming at the outset, but in the long run, it saves time because it helps you anticipate potential problems and avoid unpleasant surprises! By involving and communicating with everyone concerned, it also creates good will and trust. The systematic approach described in this article can be applied with success to a wide variety of transitions and changes in school-age programs. Use the games in **Illustration 1** to support your systematic plans for a smooth transition from summer to fall.

Illustration I. Games to Support the Transition from Summer to Fall

Game	Equipment Needed	How to Play	Tip
ATTENTION GETTER	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a quiet voice say, "If you can hear me, tap your head." (Begin lightly tapping your own head. Kids standing close by are likely to begin tapping their heads right away.) • Continue tapping your head and repeat the request again, "if you can hear me, tap your head." (A few more kids will join in.) • Continue tapping your head and repeating the phrase until you have everyone's attention. • Variations: Change the request each time: "if you can hear me, clap twice.....touch your toes.....snap your fingers.....say Oh yeah!.....etc. 	Use attention getters sparingly when you really need attention. Overuse interrupts children's work and play and can seem like nagging.
WHO'S DONE WHAT I'VE DONE	Chairs for each person, except one	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather kids in a circle of chairs. • Provide one chair for each person, except for a leader who will stand in the center of the circle. • Ask the leader standing in the center to think of something he or she did this summer that others <i>may also have done</i> (e.g. went to the beach, caught lightning bugs, went fishing, went to a museum, read a book, etc.). • The goal is to think of activities participants may have in common, rather than activities only one person may have done. • Then, have the leader identify the selected activity by calling out: "Who went to the beach?" (or "Who went to a museum?" etc.). • Everyone who went to the beach must leave his or her chair and find another chair. No one is allowed to go to the chair on either side of his or her present chair. • Those who didn't go to the beach stay seated. • The leader tries to get one of the vacated chairs and the person who doesn't find a chair becomes the next leader. 	Be sure kids try to think of activities they may have in common. Otherwise the game bogs down. The goal is to have as many participants as possible leave their seats. If the leader names an activity that no one else is likely to have done (e.g. "Who met the President?"), no seats will be vacated and the leader will have to think of another activity.
60 SECOND CONVERSATIONS	Watch or clock without a second hand. Noisemaker.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have children gather in two circles, one circle inside the other. The same number of participants should be in each circle. • Participants in the outer circle face in. Participants in the inner circle face out. • Each participant in the outer circle should be directly facing a participant in the inner circle. (That is, each person has a partner.) • When everyone is in place, the leader asks an open-ended question such as: "What was the best thing you did this summer?" <i>Where did you spend most of your time this summer? What activities would you like to do in the program? What do you want to accomplish this year?</i> • Develop your own questions based on the ages of kids in the program. When you ask the selected questions, have partners talk about the question until 60 seconds is up. • Use a noisemaker to signal the conversation to stop. When the noisemaker sounds, participants in the inner circle should move one step clockwise so they are facing a new partner. • The leader then asks the same question again and a new conversation takes place. • Continue the rotation so that the same question is discussed 3 or 4 times. • Then change to a new question and continue the rotation. • Follow the activity with a group discussion of what participants learned about each other by discussing the questions. 	Vary the length of the conversations according to the ages and maturity of the participants.

Illustration I. Games to Support the Transition from Summer to Fall (continued)

Game	Equipment Needed	How to Play	Tip
<p>GROUP JUGGLE GET TO KNOW YOU ACTIVITY</p>	<p>Nerf balls, other soft items for tossing and catching (a rubber chicken adds to the fun)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have 8 to 12 participants gather in a circle, including the group leader. • Before you start the game, have each participant think of a favorite summer game or activity to link with their first name, e.g. "Sean basketball," "Sara painter," "Jason bicycle," "Kim skateboarder," "Shonda reader," "Manuel golf," etc.). • Go around the circle and have each participant share the name he or she chose. • Tell everyone to use this "summer name" as they play the game. <p>Round one:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The leader starts by tossing an object to another player who calls out his/her "summer name" when catching the ball. • This player tosses to another player who calls out his/her "summer name". • The game continues in this fashion until each player has caught the ball and called out his/her "summer name" once and the ball returns to the first player. The idea is to have each player catch the ball once. • Players should remember to whom they threw the ball in the first round and continue throwing to the same player in future rounds. <p>Round Two:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat the same sequence for practice and continue calling out names. <p>Round Three:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat the same sequence several more times until the ball is moving smoothly. • Then without telling the group you will do so, toss out another ball so that two balls are going. • Then, toss out a third, a fourth, a fifth, or however many balls the group can juggle without losing track of what's going on. Use the rubber chicken or another silly object as the last item you toss! <p>Variation: Once the players know each other's names fairly well, have everyone shout each person's name when he/she catches the ball. Encourage players to shout enthusiastically as if they were cheering for each player.</p>	<p>Tip for Round One: Have participants hold their hands in front of their bodies until they have caught and tossed the ball. After tossing the ball, participants should place their hands behind their back to indicate they are temporarily not "eligible receivers."</p> <p>Tip for Round Three: Juggling more than one ball takes a lot of practice. Try adding only one additional ball of the first day. Add more as the group becomes more skilled. Omit the calling of names when participants are juggling more than two balls.</p>

Southeastern Pennsylvania
School Age Child Care Project
201 Sabine Avenue
Narberth, PA 19072

Phone: 610-617-4550 option 4
Fax: 610-617-3550
E-mail: sepasacc@melc.org
www.sepasacc.org



A division of

TRAINING RESOURCE: TAKING THE NEXT STEPS

Questions to Think and Talk About

1. What strategies can you use to learn about the summer experiences of children and youth who will attend your program in the fall? How will you learn about how they've changed and grown over the summer?
2. What adjustments and changes will you make to your program for fall?
3. What changes are in store for children and youth in your program when the fall session begins? (E.g. new facilities? Different room? Different school? New staff? Additional equipment and resources? New boundaries? Etc.) How will you help children adjust to the changes?
4. What strategies will you use to help children, parents, and staff make connections and build new relationships as they move from summer to fall? How will you help children renew friendships that may have lapsed over the summer?
5. What steps will you take to coordinate the transition to fall with school personnel and/or other key program or community stakeholders?

Learning Activities

1. Assess your program environment to determine what changes or additions need to be made to get the program ready children when they arrive for the new fall session.
2. Develop a set of daily activity plans for the first two weeks of the fall session. Select daily activities and games that will help children 1) get to know each other, the program staff, and the program environment; 2) share summer experiences; 3) build positive relationships; 4) learn what the fall program has to offer; 5) help set rules, limits, and consequences as appropriate; 6) get involved in shaping and co-creating the program; and 7) set personal goals for the year.
3. Create an action plan for engaging children as soon as they arrive each day for the first week of the fall session. Take a systematic approach to ensuring that each child/youth feels welcome and comfortable in the program.