

Managing Transitions

*Supporting regulation, predictability, and emotional safety
in dance classes*



What This Supports

These strategies support dancers who may:

- become anxious or overwhelmed during changes
- struggle to switch tasks or disengage from activities
- need extra processing time between exercises
- find unpredictability dysregulating
- show emotional or behavioural responses during transitions

Transitions are not interruptions. They are a **core part of teaching**.

Why Transitions Are Challenging

Transitions require dancers to:

- stop one task
- process new information
- shift attention
- regulate sensory input
- understand new expectations

All at once.

For neurodivergent dancers, this can overload executive functioning and trigger stress responses, even when the transition seems minor.

Practical Strategies for Managing Transitions

1. Use Predictable Class Structure

Why it helps

Knowing what comes next reduces anxiety and supports nervous system regulation.

What to try

- Keep the same class flow each week
 - Use a visual schedule at the start of class
 - Refer back to it during transitions
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2. Give Clear Warnings Before Changes

Why it helps

Advance notice allows the brain time to prepare.

What to try

- Use time warnings
 - Use consistent phrases
 - Give countdowns before transitions
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3. Use Consistent Transition Signals

Why it helps

Consistent cues reduce cognitive load and improve response.

What to try

- Choose one signal per transition type
 - Use the same phrase, sound, or gesture every time
 - Allow dancers to respond at their own pace
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4. Break Transitions into Small Steps

Why it helps

Multi-step instructions can be overwhelming.

What to try

- Give one instruction at a time
 - Pause between steps
 - Model the action where possible
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5. Allow Flexible Transition Timing

Why it helps

Some dancers need more time to disengage and reset.

What to try

- Allow dancers to move at their own pace
 - Permit brief regulation breaks
 - Avoid rushing or penalising slower transitions
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6. Use Music to Support Transitions

Why it helps

Music provides rhythm and predictability.

What to try

- Use the same short music clip for transitions
 - Allow familiarity to build over time
 - Pair music with movement or breathing
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7. Support Emotional Responses

Why it helps

Transitions can trigger anxiety or loss of control.

What to try

- Acknowledge feelings without judgement
 - Offer reassurance
 - Provide choice where possible
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8. Create Predictable Endings

Why it helps

Endings are also transitions.

What to try

- End class with the same ritual each time
 - Use a consistent closing phrase or movement
 - Preview the next class briefly
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Strengths Transition Support Unlocks

When transitions are supported, dancers often show:

- calmer behaviour
- improved focus
- smoother learning flow
- reduced anxiety
- greater trust in the teacher

Predictable transitions create **emotional safety**.

Key Takeaway for Teachers

Transitions are not just about moving from one exercise or class to another. They are about **supporting the nervous system**.

When teachers handle transitions with care and predictability, dancers feel safer, calmer, and more able to learn.