

Everyday Transition Guide

Simple Music & Rhythm Strategies for Home Routines



Transitions require switching attention, processing sensory information, and predicting what comes next. For neurodivergent tamariki, these shifts can consume significant cognitive energy.



Music acts as a natural bridge. It provides predictability, auditory cues, and a gentle structure that reduces the need for constant verbal instruction, helping your child feel grounded and in control.

Core Principles for Using Music at Home

1. **Co-Regulation Over Compliance:** Your calm voice and steady beat act as an external anchor. Music isn't about making your child comply - it's a shared tool to regulate their nervous system alongside yours.
2. **Predictability Over Novelty:** Use the same short tune or playlist for a specific transition every day. The brain learns: "When I hear this sound, my body knows what comes next."
3. **Focus on Connection Not Perfection:** You don't need to be a skilled musician to use music! Humming, tapping a steady beat, or singing a song offers moments of authentic, playful connection with your child.
4. **Playful Lyric Swaps:** Make up silly, customised lyrics to familiar tunes to turn everyday tasks into an engaging game.
5. **Honour Agency & Choice:** Let your child pick the song, instrument, tempo, or lead as the "conductor." Respect their choice to join in actively or simply listen quietly in a safe, comfortable space.

Easing into the Day: Waking & Getting Ready

Mornings can bring time pressure, which may trigger sensory overload or a protective need for autonomy. Music sets a gentle pace without harsh alarms.

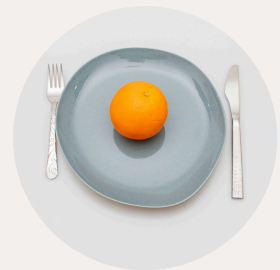


- **The Soft Landing (Waking Up):** Play low-volume acoustic music 5–10 minutes before getting up. Give your child time to process the sound before introducing spoken words.
- **The Movement Anchor (Dressing & Packing):** Tap a steady beat on your lap or table while singing a simple repeated line ("First we put our socks on, 1–2–3, here we go") to provide physical pacing.

Mealtimes: Anchoring the Shift to the Table

Moving from active play to sitting down at the table requires a shift in sensory regulation, asking a child's nervous system to slow down while adjusting to complex mealtime sensory input such as sounds, smells, textures, and social demands.

- **The Transition Bridge (Stopping Play):** Cue your child a few minutes early using gestural (NZSL 'finished'), verbal, or musical cues focused on completing an activity ("two more turns on the slide"). Follow with a gentle "pack-away" song so the transition unfolds naturally when the music stops.
- **Grounded Table Presence (Eating):** Play low-tempo acoustic music or gentle ambient soundscapes in the background during meals. Soft, repetitive rhythms soothe the nervous system and support comfortable sitting.



Bedtime: Slowing the Evening Tempo

Transitioning into sleep requires a step-by-step reduction in sensory stimulation, helping a child's nervous system gradually down-shift and register that it is safe to unwind, let go of the day, and rest.



- **The Household Shift (60 Mins Out):** Lower the volume and slow the tempo of household audio - switch to simple, slow instrumentals (like solo piano or guitar) to signal it's time to unwind.
- **The Physical Wind-Down:** Use slow, rhythmic call-and-response humming or a single repeated lullaby tune during bath, PJ, and tooth-brushing routines to keep the sensory environment predictable.
- **Bedroom Settling (Drifting Off):** Use a consistent "sleep anchor" sound - like ambient noise, soft humming, or nature sounds - that stays on continuously as your child falls asleep.

A Note from The Little Musical Caravan:

Every child's sensory nervous system is unique. Observe what sounds bring your child ease and what sounds feel overstimulating. There is no "right" genre - follow your child's lead, adapt as you go, and prioritise connection over routine strictness.