

GUIDING FAMILIES THROUGH EVERY TRANSITION

A Director's Guide to Enrollment, Classroom Moves & Program Exit

Practical tools for every phase of the family journey — plus one-page guides for your teaching team

In This Guide

Every family who walks through your doors will move through three transition points — coming in, moving up, and eventually, moving on. How you handle each one shapes whether that family stays, refers others, and speaks well of your program after they leave.

This guide walks through all three, with a director-facing tool for each phase built into the chapter, plus a standalone teacher one-pager for each phase collected in the Appendix. The one-pagers are built to double as a short staff PD series — use them one at a time, or run all three back-to-back.

- Part 1 — Welcoming Families In (Enrollment & Onboarding)
- Part 2 — Moving Within the Program (Classroom-to-Classroom Transitions)
- Part 3 — Saying Goodbye Well (Exit & Withdrawal)
- Closing — Building a Transition-Ready Culture
- Appendix — All Six Tools, Ready to Print

Why Transitions Matter

Transitions are the moments families remember most. A new parent's first two weeks shape whether they trust you with their child long-term. A poorly handled classroom move can turn a settled family into an anxious one overnight. And how a family is treated on their way out — whether they're moving on to kindergarten or leaving under harder circumstances — determines whether they refer friends or warn them away.

Directors often treat these moments as administrative: a form to sign, a room to reassign, a file to close. But each one is also a relationship moment. Programs that manage transitions well see it show up in retention, in enrollment referrals, and in the family engagement documentation that quality rating systems ask you to produce.

This guide gives you a consistent, repeatable approach to all three transition points — plus the tools to hand your team so the approach doesn't live only in your head.

Part 1 — Welcoming Families In

Enrollment & Onboarding

Before Day One: What Pre-Enrollment Should Accomplish

The tour and enrollment conversation is your first — and best — chance to reduce first-day surprises for both the family and your staff. Treat it as information gathering, not just a sales moment.

- Ask about routines, not just logistics: sleep habits, comfort items, feeding preferences, and words the family uses at home for common needs.
- Ask about family structure and pickup authorization clearly and without assumption.
- Set expectations for the first two weeks up front — what a hard goodbye looks like, and that it's normal.

The First Two Weeks: A Structured Onboarding Window

New families do better with a defined window of extra attention rather than being folded into normal routine on day one. Build a light structure your staff can repeat with every new family, regardless of who's assigned to that classroom.

- Assign one staff member as the point of contact for the first two weeks.
- Plan a brief check-in at pickup each day during week one — even 60 seconds builds trust.
- Share one specific, positive observation about the child daily, not just a general 'good day.'

Supporting Separation Anxiety — For Children and Parents

Separation anxiety isn't only the child's experience. Parents drop-off anxiety is real, and an anxious parent often makes a child's transition harder. Coach your staff to support both.

- Give the child a consistent goodbye ritual and keep it short — lingering goodbyes tend to extend distress.
- Allow a comfort item from home during the adjustment period, even if it's outside normal policy, for the first two weeks.
- Send a brief photo or note to anxious parents within the first hour, if staffing allows — it does more to settle a nervous parent than any verbal reassurance at drop-off.

TOOL New Family Onboarding Checklist (30 / 60 / 90 Days)

Use this to track onboarding for every new family. Assign it to the child's primary teacher or the designated point of contact.

Day 1

- ☐ Family receives written first-day recap (schedule followed, meals, nap, mood)

- ☐ Point-of-contact staff member introduced by name to both parent and child

Week 1

- ☐ Daily 60-second check-in at pickup
- ☐ Comfort item / home routine accommodations confirmed with family
- ☐ Staff documents any separation difficulty and shares strategy with family

30 Days

- ☐ Formal check-in conversation with family — how is the transition going?
- ☐ Confirm all intake paperwork and emergency information is complete and current

60 Days

- ☐ Review attendance pattern for early signs of disengagement
- ☐ Invite family to any upcoming program or classroom event

90 Days

- ☐ Onboarding window closes — confirm family feels fully settled
- ☐ Ask directly: is there anything we could be doing better?

PD USE Running This as a Staff PD Moment

Teacher one-pager: "Welcoming New Families" — printable version in the Appendix.

When: Introduce during a regular staff meeting or a dedicated PD session — no special scheduling needed.

How long: About 10–15 minutes — read the page together, then discuss.

Discussion prompt: *Think of a family whose first two weeks went smoothly. What made the difference?*

Part 2 — Moving Within the Program

Classroom-to-Classroom Transitions

Recognizing Readiness

Age is a starting point, not the deciding factor. Look at the whole child before initiating a classroom move.

- Developmental milestones typical of the next age group
- Social comfort with more independence and a larger group size
- Physical readiness for the next room's routines (nap structure, self-feeding, mobility needs)

Telling Families Before It Happens

Families should never learn about a classroom move on the day it happens. Build in a standard notice window so it's a routine expectation, not a surprise.

- Give written notice at least two weeks before a planned move
- Explain why the move is happening — readiness, not just age or space needs
- Invite questions before the move date, not just after

Making the Move Gradual

A single hard cutover is harder on the child than a phased introduction. Build in visits before the move is final.

- Short visits to the new classroom in the two weeks prior
- A consistent comfort item or routine carried over from the old classroom
- A brief overlap where the previous teacher checks in during the first week

TOOL Classroom Transition Notice + Readiness Checklist

Use the checklist to confirm readiness, then send the notice to families at least two weeks before the move.

Readiness Checklist

- ☐ Child meets developmental milestones typical of the next classroom
- ☐ Child shows comfort with the next room's group size and structure
- ☐ Physical readiness confirmed (nap, feeding, mobility)
- ☐ Lead teacher and director agree the timing is right

Family Notice — Key Points to Include

- ☐ Planned move date (minimum two weeks out)

- ☐ Reason for the move (readiness-based, specific to the child)
- ☐ New teacher's name and an invitation to meet them before the move
- ☐ Open invitation for questions before the move date

PD USE Running This as a Staff PD Moment

Teacher one-pager: "Supporting Classroom Moves" — printable version in the Appendix.

When: Introduce during a regular staff meeting or a dedicated PD session — no special scheduling needed.

How long: About 10–15 minutes — read the page together, then discuss.

Discussion prompt: *What's one thing we could do earlier to make classroom moves feel less sudden for families?*

Part 3 — Saying Goodbye Well

Exit & Withdrawal

Two Kinds of Exits

Not every exit looks the same, and treating them identically misses the point of each.

- Planned exits — aging out, moving to kindergarten, a family relocating on good terms
- Unplanned exits — withdrawal over a concern, a payment issue, or a sudden family circumstance

Both deserve a consistent, respectful process. How a family is treated on the way out often determines whether they return in the future, refer others, or leave a public review that shapes your next enrollment.

A Respectful Offboarding Protocol

- Acknowledge the exit directly with the family — don't let it happen silently
- For unplanned exits, ask what drove the decision — even if you can't change the outcome, you learn something
- Compile the child's portfolio — work samples, photos, and progress notes — and share it with the family as a keepsake, not just a compliance record
- Return all personal items and records promptly
- Leave the door open for re-enrollment where appropriate

Kindergarten Transition & Records Handoff

- Provide families with a summary of developmental progress they can share with the new school
- Offer a kindergarten-readiness conversation in the final months, not just a final report
- Keep a copy of records on file per your program's retention policy

TOOL Exit Checklist + Family Exit Survey

Use the checklist for every exit, planned or unplanned. Send the survey within one week of the child's last day.

Exit Checklist

- ☐ Exit type identified (planned or unplanned) and reason documented
- ☐ Final day confirmed in writing with the family
- ☐ Child's portfolio compiled (work samples, photos, progress notes) and shared with the family
- ☐ All personal belongings and records returned or transferred
- ☐ Outstanding balance or account items resolved

- ☐ Family exit survey sent within one week

Family Exit Survey — Core Questions

- ☐ What is the primary reason for your family's transition?
- ☐ What did our program do well during your time here?
- ☐ What could we have done better?
- ☐ Would you consider returning or referring another family to us? Why or why not?

PD USE Running This as a Staff PD Moment

Teacher one-pager: "Supporting Families at Exit" — printable version in the Appendix.

When: Introduce during a regular staff meeting or a dedicated PD session — no special scheduling needed.

How long: About 10–15 minutes — read the page together, then discuss.

Discussion prompt: *How do we want a departing family to describe their last week with us?*

Closing — Building a Transition-Ready Culture

Enrollment, classroom moves, and exits will happen constantly and predictably in any program. The difference between a program that handles them well and one that doesn't isn't luck — it's whether the approach lives in a repeatable process or only in the director's head.

Use the three teacher one-pagers as a short PD series over three staff meetings, or introduce them one at a time as each transition type comes up naturally. Either way, the goal is the same: every staff member should be able to execute a strong transition without needing you to walk them through it in the moment.

Programs that get this right see it show up where it matters — in family retention, in referrals, and in the documented evidence of strong family engagement that quality systems ask you to produce.

Appendix — All Six Tools, Ready to Print

All six tools are reproduced here as standalone, ready-to-print documents — the three director tools first, followed by the three teacher one-pagers.

Director Tool — New Family Onboarding Checklist (30 / 60 / 90 Days)

Use this to track onboarding for every new family. Assign it to the child's primary teacher or the designated point of contact.

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- ☐ Review attendance pattern for early signs of disengagement
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Director Tool — Classroom Transition Notice + Readiness Checklist

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Director Tool — Exit Checklist + Family Exit Survey

Use the checklist for every exit, planned or unplanned. Send the survey within one week of the child's last day.

Exit Checklist

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- ☐ Family exit survey sent within one week

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- ☐ What could we have done better?
- ☐ Would you consider returning or referring another family to us? Why or why not?

Teacher One-Pager — Welcoming New Families

Your Role in the First Two Weeks

New families are watching closely in the first two weeks. Small, consistent actions from you matter more than anything written in a handbook.

Do

- Use a short, consistent goodbye routine with the child every day
- Share one specific detail about the child's day at pickup — not just "good day"
- Allow comfort items from home during the adjustment window
- Reassure anxious parents briefly and confidently at drop-off

Avoid

- Letting goodbyes drag out — it tends to increase distress for the child
- Vague updates ("fine," "okay") that leave parents guessing
- Discussing a child's difficult adjustment in front of them or other families

Watch For

- A child who hasn't settled by week two — flag it to your director
- A parent who seems more anxious than the child — a brief note or photo can help more than words

Teacher One-Pager — Supporting Classroom Moves

If a Child Is Leaving Your Classroom

- Talk positively about the new classroom and teacher in front of the child
- Support the visit schedule — don't treat pre-move visits as optional extras
- Send a brief note to the receiving teacher about routines, comfort strategies, and what works

If a Child Is Joining Your Classroom

- Learn the child's name and one comfort strategy before their first visit
- Keep one familiar routine or item from their previous classroom during the first week
- Give the family a specific, positive update after the first full day

Watch For

- A child who seems unsettled more than a week after the move — flag it to your director
- A family who seems unclear on the reason for the move — this is a signal the notice wasn't fully understood

Teacher One-Pager — Supporting Families at Exit

Closing the Relationship Well

- Acknowledge the departure warmly with both the child and the family — don't treat it as routine
- For a child moving to kindergarten, talk positively about the transition ahead
- For an unplanned exit, keep your tone professional and warm regardless of the circumstances
- Help assemble the child's portfolio — work samples, photos, and a favorite memory — so the director can share it as a keepsake
- Return any classroom work, photos, or projects on or before the last day

What to Say

- "We've loved having [child] with us — here's what we'll remember most."
- "If you ever want to come back or need anything, we're here."

Watch For

- A last day that comes and goes without acknowledgment — flag this pattern to your director
- Signs the family is leaving upset — let your director know so they can follow up personally