

INSIGHT | ROUTINES

Prevention Before Escalation

If we know that waiting, crowding, and rushed transitions create predictable flashpoints, we redesign the routine — not the child.

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Most behaviour escalation does not start with the child being unwilling. It starts with the routine becoming too crowded, too rushed, or too hard to manage. The behaviour is the symptom. The pressure point is the cause.

Pack-away after deep play — a worked example

What adults see: the child refuses to pack away. What the pattern reveals: the child was deeply engaged, now faces a large cleanup task, and is managing disappointment — three demands at once.

- Break the task down: "Start with the wheels, then the blocks."
- Make it visible: basket labels, photos, a first-job queue.
- Protect deep play: take a photo. "We have a photo of what you built."
- Join in beside the child rather than calling instructions from across the room.

Five pressure points to redesign

Pressure point	Design adjustment
Waiting and lining up	Move children in smaller groups. Stagger hand-washing.
Pack-away	Break into named tasks. Use first-job queues. Join in physically.
Sudden transitions	Give a warning and a bridge. Five more minutes, then we start.
Deep play interrupted	Take a photo. Save the creation on a shelf.
Group time creating behaviour	Review group size, length, content, and adult support.

Agency within routines

The routine stays non-negotiable. But the child has a choice inside it. "You choose the first job — cups or plates?" The child cannot refuse the task, but they choose how they enter it. That gives participation without handing over the boundary.

FOR CASUAL EDUCATORS

Ask: "What choices or jobs are children usually given in these routines?" That follows the room's existing practice rather than inventing a new system on the spot.

This article is part of The Practitioner's Guide to the NQF — M^cArthur's editorial series for the early childhood education sector. For the full whitepaper and webinar replay, visit www.mcarthur.com.au/insights.