

Information Sheet

Effectively Preparing Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders for Transitions

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Transition is a multi-layered and ongoing process that involves socialisation, communication and behaviour, and it therefore includes the three areas that individuals on the spectrum have most difficulty with.

The following article provides strategies to help individuals with an Autism Spectrum Disorder transition to new environments. It is aimed at the individual, families, and professionals to help in the understanding and impact of change and how to prepare for the transition process.

Transition means change

Transitioning from one environment to another is an enormous change that, dependant on many factors, can be more or less successful. Presenting any of us with an unknown and unexpected event can be stressful, confusing, and unpleasant.

The purpose of transition planning is to reduce stress and anxiety caused by change

in individuals with an ASD. Preparation provides individuals with opportunities to be successful and helps prevent behavioural issues that are a result of unexpected change, anxiety, and/or phobia.

Strategies to help with transition

Below is a list of strategies that may assist individuals and families when experiencing the difficult time of transition.

It is important to remember that every person on the autism spectrum is unique and therefore strategies that are effective with one individual may not necessarily be effective with another.

Designing a transition plan that suits your specific needs is an important step towards achieving a successful transition

1. First and foremost is prepare, prepare, prepare.
2. Visiting the new environment and meeting some of the new people before the official transition takes place.
3. Creating an individual profile that identifies the individuals' strengths and weaknesses and share this with relevant individuals such as teaching staff, managers etc.
4. Structure and routine are also very important: the use of visual timetables, diaries or wall charts can be very helpful



- tailor this to suit the individual with an ASD.
5. Timetables, diaries, and wall charts must include activities in sequential order so that the individual knows what is happening next.
 6. Consistency and continuity assists in providing a predictable environment where change is pre-warned.
 7. Create a map of the new environment or setting that the individual with an ASD will be attending and on it, mark each key locations such as toilets, classroom, office(s), library, nurse etc.
 8. Visit the unstructured outdoor areas within the new setting, such as the courtyard or playground.
 9. Having visited the various places across the new environment, for young children it may now be useful to create a photo album of different locations and people that the child can refer back to at any point in time.
 10. It may be helpful to write a Social Story™ that can be read on a regular basis before and during the transition process.
 11. Identify a quiet space or safe area where the individual can retreat to if necessary.
 12. Checklists can be very helpful in providing guidance throughout the day.
 13. Use of a clock, watch or timer of some sort should be utilised to assist the individual with understanding the concept of time periods that change throughout the day.
 14. Use simple, direct and firm language when discussing transition stages.
 15. Provide choices but ensure that these are limited so that the individual does not feel overwhelmed but empowered by having some control over various situations/activities.
 16. Procedures and rules should be clearly outlined and a copy possibly kept inside the individual's diary.
 17. Educate individuals that will be coming into contact with the student/adult with an ASD; provide them with an individual profile that highlights strengths, difficulties and other important information about the person.
 18. Individuals with ASD may take some time to become familiar with their new surrounding so allow plenty of time for processing and adjustment.
 19. Visual instructions in the new setting can be very helpful: use pictorial representations of activities, classrooms, break times etc.
 20. Teach the individual "self-prompts" to promote empowerment and independence in their new setting; some examples might be, "you can do it", "keep going", "looks fine". Practice these at home with consistent reinforcement.
 21. Engage in relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, walking to release some of the anxiety.
 22. Using guided imagery can also help; where an individual imagines something pleasant and calming during a difficult situation.



Resources

Making the Move – by K.I. Al-Ghani & Lynda Kenward (2009). Making the move: A guide for school and parents on the transfer of pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) from primary to secondary school. A practical workbook that guides parents and/or teachers through the transition process. The book provides a range of worksheets and resources for term by term planning. Available from the Autism Victoria Library: #3279.

Career Training and Personal Planning for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders – by Vicki Lundine and Catherine Smith (2006). A practical resource for schools that is aimed to assist teachers, parents, and carers. The book includes information and worksheets about self-awareness, life skills, decision-making, goal-setting, problem-solving, career awareness, job preparation and career portfolios. Available from the Autism Victoria Library: #3281.

Successful School Change and Transition for the Child with Asperger Syndrome – by Clare Lawrence (2010). A practical book that provides advice on how to prepare a child with Asperger Syndrome for moving to a new school, and how to make the transition as smooth as possible. The book includes strategies on how to structure the transition process using a timeline and promoting effective communication between parents, teachers and support staff. Available from the Autism Victoria Library: #3262.



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