

Transition planning for autistic people

About transition

Transitions happen regularly for many people. A transition can involve moving from one activity to the next or from one setting or event to another. Transitioning involves three areas that people on the spectrum find challenging - socialisation, communication and behaviour.

Transition means change

Transitioning into any new environment can be stressful, confusing and unpleasant. You can pre-warn and prepare for the change to relieve some of this stress. This can also help to make a new setting or activity more predictable.

The purpose of transition planning is to support and prepare the person for what's to come so that they feel more comfortable and less anxious. Preparation provides opportunities for people to be successful.

Strategies to help with transition

These strategies might help to make transitions easier for you and your family.

It's important to remember that every person on the autism spectrum is unique, so strategies that work with one person might not work with another person.

A key step towards a successful transition is designing a transition plan that suits your specific needs. As you read through the list of strategies take note of the strategies that you'd like to include in your transition plan.



1. Set aside time to prepare for the transition.
2. Visit the new environment and meet some of the new people before the official transition.
3. Make an individual profile that lists the persons' strengths and challenges and share this with relevant people, for example teaching staff, managers etc.
4. Support structure and routine in the new environment with visual timetables, diaries or wall charts and tailor this to suit the autistic person.
5. Include activities in timetables, diaries, and wall charts in the order they happen so that the person knows what's happening next.

6. Create a map of the new environment and mark key locations such as toilets, classroom, office(s), library, nurse etc.

7. Visit the unstructured outdoor areas within the new environment, such as the courtyard or playground.

8. Create a photo album of different people and places in the new environment that the person can refer back to at any time.

9. Write a social script that can be read on a regular basis, before and during the transition process.

10. Identify a quiet space or safe area where the person can retreat to if necessary.

11. Make checklists to guide the person. For example, a checklist for packing their school bag.

12. Use a clock, watch or timer to help the person to understand the time periods that change throughout the day.

13. Use simple, direct and firm language when talking about transition stages.

14. Provide limited choices for activities. This empowers the person without being overwhelming.

15. Get a copy of any procedures and rules. Older students and adults could keep a copy in their diary.

16. Educate people who will be in contact with the autistic person; provide them with an individual profile that highlights strengths, challenges and other important information about the person.

17. Autistic people may take some time to become familiar with their new surrounding so allow plenty of time for processing and adjustment.

18. Use visual instructions, for example pictures to represent activities, classrooms, break times etc.

19. Teach the individual “self-prompts” to promote empowerment and independence in their new environment; some examples might be, “you can do it”, “keep going”, “looks fine”. Practise these at home and praise the person when they use their prompts.

20. Engage in relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, walking to release some of the anxiety.

21. Use guided imagery; where a person imagines something pleasant and calming during a difficult time.

Resources

Al-Ghani, K.I. & Kenward, L. (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*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley. A practical workbook that guides parents and/or teachers through the transition process with worksheets and planning resources.

Lundine, V. & Smith, C. (2006). *Career Training and Personal Planning for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley. A practical resource for teachers, parents, and carers that includes information and worksheets about; self-awareness, life skills, decision-making, goal-setting, problem-solving, career awareness, job preparation and career portfolios.

Lawrence, C. (2010). *Successful School Change and Transition for the Child with Asperger Syndrome*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley. A practical book that provides advice on how to prepare a child with Asperger Syndrome for moving to a new school. The book includes strategies on how to structure the transition process.

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