

For parents and carers: Preparing to start secondary school

Your role

Starting secondary school is a big change for you and for your child. The changes that come with starting secondary school can be challenging for autistic children. Many autistic children experience anxiety, for example in new places and when meeting new people. You can reduce the stress of the transition to secondary school by preparing your child to start secondary school. You can do this by supporting your child to learn new skills and by providing information about your child's strengths and challenges to your child's primary school and secondary school.

Changes due to Coronavirus

The restrictions to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) have caused a lot of changes at primary and secondary schools.

Preparing to start secondary school may be different to what you had planned for your child. You and your child may not have been able to go to events like Open Days at secondary schools or meet with teachers and other students in person.

That's OK. Instead many schools are offering virtual Open Days, video meetings and other ways to welcome new students to their secondary school.

Ask your child's teacher and your child's secondary school about what's available. Then talk with your child about which opportunities they can use to get ready for secondary school.

Working together

We asked parents and carers of autistic children to tell us what helped in getting support for their autistic child at school. They told us:

“Good communication and partnership with the school.”

Wendy, parent of an autistic child

“Planning, planning, planning...Everyone being on the same page.”

Li, carer of an autistic child

It's good to start thinking about preparing your child for secondary school when they're in Grade 6 but any preparation will help. A key part of your role is to work with the primary school, the secondary school and your child to share information. The main purpose of working together is to develop a transition plan.

Your child's transition plan

A transition plan is a written document with information about how you, your child's primary school, your child's secondary school and your child will work together to prepare your child for a successful start at secondary school. The transition plan starts in primary school and continues as your child starts secondary school. The plan guides the skills your child will learn and practise during Grade 6 to prepare for Year 7. It also lists the support for your child at secondary school.

Usually the primary school will contact you in Term 3 or 4 when your child is in Grade 6 to invite you to a Student Support Group (SSG) meeting with your child's secondary school. You can contact the primary school to request an SSG meeting with the secondary school in Term 3 or 4 if they haven't contacted you. Read more in the [Timeline and checklist of steps to create a transition plan](#). This timeline also gives information about your roles and responsibilities as well as those of the primary school, the secondary school and the student.

Your child's role

When you involve your child in planning their transition to secondary school you help them to build important skills such as self-awareness, self-advocacy and independence. You can bring your child to the SSG meetings, or even for part of the meeting, to give their input on decisions that are being made about their transition plan. Read the information sheet on [Preparing to start secondary school for autistic students](#) with your child to find out what autistic students say helps in preparing for secondary school.

What the Disability Standards for Education mean for your child's school

Section 32 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, states that all schools must follow the Disability Standards for Education 2005. See: [Disability Standards](#). The Disability Standards list the legal obligations of all schools. They must:

- (i) Consult, with the student and/or parent or carer;
- (ii) Make reasonable adjustments; and
- (iii) Prevent victimisation and harassment (bullying).

An adjustment is an action taken by the school to assist a student with a disability to participate in education on the same basis as other students. SSG meetings are one way teachers consult with parents. The SSG is a team that works together and provides the opportunity to share information and think about each other's perspectives. The purpose of SSG meetings is to agree on reasonable adjustments and how they'll be put in place. For examples of reasonable adjustments, read more in [For secondary teachers: Supporting autistic students' transition to secondary school](#).

Steps for Preparation

1. Communicate information

Your child's primary school will complete a Transition Statement to provide to the secondary school. The purpose of this document is to gather information about your child which can be used in developing the transition plan. Information is gathered from the primary teacher, allied health professionals, you and your child. Read more about the information that is shared and gathered to complete the transition statement and develop a transition plan in [For primary teachers: Supporting autistic students' transition to secondary school](#).

Share your child's interests, strengths and challenges with the primary teacher. When communicating with your child's teachers, let them know of any challenges that make communication difficult for you. For example, you may be autistic or English may not be your first language. Let your child's teachers know how you prefer to communicate so they can support this.

For children supported through the [Program for Student with Disabilities](#), a review of funding usually takes place in Grade 6. Ask your child's primary school about this. Read more in the [Timeline and checklist of steps to create a transition plan](#).

Your child's Victorian government primary school will transfer student information or records to your child's chosen Victorian government secondary school. It's important for the secondary school to have this information because it will help them to know about the best support for your child. The primary school doesn't need your consent to transfer the information. The transfer and receipt of this student information also enables the Department of Education and Training to fulfil important legal obligations.

2. Contribute to a transition plan

The transition plan should consider:

- WHAT skills need support and what actions need to be taken during and after the transition
- WHO is responsible for supporting your child with the skill or completing the action
- WHEN it will happen

You contribute information to the plan at SSG meetings during Grade 6. The transition plan should include the skills your child will learn and practise. You and your child will be included in the planning and decisions about them. The transition plan should include strategies which have worked for your child during past transitions and may help to prepare them for secondary school.

The table on pages 5 and 6 lists the supports you may provide for your child at home to help them prepare to start secondary school. Talk with your child about which supports they need and think about whether there are any other supports you'd like to add. You could make a list of the supports to take to the next SSG meeting to discuss with your child's teachers. Read more about the skills that can be included in your child's transition plan in [For primary teachers: Supporting autistic students' transition to secondary school](#).

Supports to provide for your child

Communication with the secondary staff

- Create a one-page laminated profile (include strengths, interests, challenges and key strategies) and distribute to all subject teachers.

Become familiar with the secondary school

- Arrange to visit the school the day before other students return. Visit homeroom and put some books in their locker.
- Attend the secondary school play, musical and Open Day events with your child.
- Over the holidays regularly look over information pack and videos/ virtual tours of the secondary school.

Routines and rules

- Practise using locker padlock.
- Familiarise your child with school rules around the use of mobile phones, computers and iPads.
- Practise the morning routine a few weeks leading up to starting the new school year.

Learning

- Ask for subject outlines at the beginning of each term and go through this with your child.

Support sensory challenges

- Provide information about sensory sensitivities.
- Practise wearing the new uniform and shoes over the school holidays.
- Consider purchasing a second-hand uniform that has been 'worn in'.

Support self-regulation

- Teach calming strategies.
- Identify known triggers.

Support social confidence

- Teach what to do and where to go on the school map/videos if they are feeling unsafe, sick, unsure or needing a break.
- Support your child in making social connections out of school.

Travel

- Plan and practise travelling to and from school.

Organisation skills

- Practise how to read a timetable.
- Pack the school bag, make lunch and lay out the school uniform the night before.
- Provide visual schedules/routines for before and after school, packing a school bag etc.
- Prepare social stories for the first day of school. Read more in [Using a social script to explain a new situation](#).

Homework and after school downtime

- Use the school's homework club if they have one.
- Minimise after school commitments in Term 1 to allow your child to have some downtime.
- Use a whiteboard with a weekly timetable of after school activities, homework tasks and assessment due dates.

Foster a positive autistic identity and pride

- Give your child resources that promote autistic pride.
- Connect your child with peer groups with similar interests.

3. Implement the planned strategies and supports for the transition

The primary school should give you, your child and the secondary school a copy of the written transition plan. Note the actions and skills that you'll work on with your child. Practise these skills when your child is calm and reinforce and praise what they are managing well. Check the progress of the actions and skills in the plan with your child and the secondary school in Term 3 and 4 of Grade 6 and Term 1 and 2 of Year 7. Agree with the secondary school on how and how often you'll communicate. For example, by planned Student Support Group (SSG) meetings or email.

4. Evaluate the transition plan

A few weeks into Term 1 of Year 7 is a good time to review the transition plan and think about what's working well and what could be improved. You can ask to meet with the secondary school to talk about how your child is going in Year 7 at any point, especially where you think this would help your child's progress. The success of the transition plan should be evaluated by you, your child and the secondary school in Term 2 of Year 7.

These four steps for preparation – communicate, contribute, implement and evaluate – will help you to prepare your child for a successful start to secondary school. If you'd like more information there's a list of resources below. If you have any questions about your individual situation contact your child's primary school or the Amaze Autism Advisors.

Resources

Amaze Autism Advisors

Contact the Amaze Autism Advisors for more information about autism, or to talk about your individual situation:
Phone: 1300 308 699
Email: info@amaze.org.au
Website and webchat: www.amaze.org.au
This service is available from 8am to 7pm, Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays).

Amaze Transition to Secondary School Information Sheets

[Timeline and checklist of steps to create a transition plan](#)
[Preparing to start secondary school for autistic students](#)
[For primary teachers: Supporting autistic students' transition to secondary school](#)
[For secondary teachers: Supporting autistic students' transition to secondary school](#)
[For parents and carers: Introduction to preparing to start secondary school](#)

DET – Transition Year 6 -7

[Moving from primary to secondary school; information for parents](#)

Positive Partnerships

[Student profile templates](#)
[Transition checklist](#)

ICAN

[Navigating High School – tips for parents and carers](#)

Raising Children Network

[Secondary school transitions](#)

Association for Children
With a Disability

[Parent resources for working with schools](#)

Allplay Learn

[Parent information](#)

Acknowledgement

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