

Information Sheet

Effectively Preparing Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders for Transitions

Compiled March 2014.

Transition is a process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another.

A transition occurs when there is some sort of change to the parameters of an activity or situation, 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.

The purpose of transition planning is to reduce stress and anxiety caused by change in individuals with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Preparation provides individuals with opportunities to be successful and helps prevent behavioural issues that are a result of unexpected change, anxiety, and/or phobia.



3 Broad Strategies to support transition

1. Scheduling: Planning to reduce anxiety.

Provide a schedule which enables the person with Autism Spectrum Disorder to make sense of what is going to happen in the future.

- Schedules should be understandable—it must make sense to the person it was designed for.
- Scheduling should be a collaborative activity—where possible give choices of activities and the order in which they will be done, this gives the person with Autism Spectrum Disorder a sense of control.
- Provide as much warning as possible about upcoming transitions to allow as much time as possible to process this information.
- Provide progressive reminders at intervals.

2. Priming: Setting expectations ahead of time.

- Prime just prior to the event occurring as this places expectations at the forefront of the person with Autism Spectrum Disorders mind.
- If the transition is to a familiar place or regularly occurring transition use the same script to articulate the expectations e.g. “We are going in the car to the park, you can play on the swing and the slide then we will go home”.

3. Grandma’s Law: the prepack principle.

- This principle refers to coupling something non-preferred with something preferred e.g first writing then playing.
- This strategy reduces anxiety about potential

future access to preferred activity and increase compliance through motivation.

- This principle can be used within the schedule.

Other Strategies to help with transition

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

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™ Script 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 can be utilised to assist the individual with understanding the concept of time periods that change throughout the day.
14. Use short concise language and instruction when discussing transition.
15. Provide some choice but ensure the individual does not feel overwhelmed but feels empowered by having some control over the situations/activities.
16. Procedures and rules should be clearly stated and a written copy available to the individual that is readily accessible.
17. Individuals with ASD may take some time to become familiar with their new surrounding so allow plenty of time for processing and adjustment to the change.
18. Visual instructions in the new setting can be very helpful: use pictorial representations of activities, site maps, classrooms, break times etc.
19. 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.
20. Encourage engagement in relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, walking to release some of the anxiety.



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.

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.

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.



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