

Helping Children with ASD Cope with and Manage Transitions in Mainstream Schools

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Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) undergo various transitions during their school career, such as the movement from home to school, within their classroom, from one class to the other, within the playground and often even within a lesson. Since this group of students has problems with any kind of changes, specific help is needed to make their 'journey' a smooth one. The demands of the present situation have to be compared to the requirements of the future situation, considering the student's skills and weaknesses. These transitions can be compared to a trip, an excursion or a journey that often involves excitement, uncertainty and anxiety, even for people without ASD.



Specific transitions children face, are the change from childcare to primary school, followed for some children by the move from primary to secondary school. Frequently excursions within regular settings are also a concern for teachers and parents of children with ASD. This group of children has a Triad of Problems and special needs have to be considered. Helpful for

finding individual solutions is the knowledge of past problems and previous effective methods. In all cases, an emergency plan should be ready.

Comparing transitions of children to preparing for a journey, we know that all kinds of contingency plans are helpful, such as packing for different kinds of weather, being aware of different customs and norms. Preparing the child for the coming situation using imagination or visual means can provide effective help. An emergency plan should be prepared, including information on



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where to get help and by preparing for familiar activities that had a calming effect in the past.



Transitions to Childcare

When enrolling your child into childcare, the child's strengths and weaknesses should be described. Parents should contact the school psychologist and request a case-conference with all key personnel. Parents need to know about the organisation of the school, expectations and routines that the child will face. Information about school rules, recess, the school bus and contact time to the teachers can be highly important.

Case-conferences should be requested and parents should report about problems of the child and methods that have worked in the past. It can be helpful to get a contact-number in case of an emergency. Parent's offer of possible help to the school can be a way to facilitate the co-operation.



Transition to Primary School

The school should be prepared for a child with ASD by informing all colleagues about autism. Another important contribution to the child's successful integration is the selection of the 'right kind of teacher'. To minimize distraction, the classroom might need some changes.

It is also very helpful to select an appropriate peer as a buddy for the child with ASD. If the school agrees, the child can be invited to visit the school prior to the first official school day. Photographs of teachers and classmates as well as yearbooks

can be helpful to reduce possible uncertainties and fears. During the first weeks the parents can be observers in the school or serve as

'rescuers' in case of an emergency. In any case the need for parents and teachers to work as a team should always be considered.

With the combined effort of all, involved transitions are easier and integration has a realistic chance. It is hoped that the above guidelines and ideas contribute to

making the indicated as well as future transitions successful and the 'journey' through changes a positive life-event.



Teachers should try to:

- Recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the child
- To discuss and implement helpful strategies
- To discuss and prevent irritation
- To discuss medical problems
- To know how to reach the parents.



Smooth and Happy Landing!



Drawing by Richard Schwaab