



AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER SERIES

Transition Planning for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Introduction

Individuals with ASD frequently have difficulty with the unknown and may fear the unpredictable. It is difficult for them to take in all of the information within a new situation, determine what the expectations are and then generate appropriate responses. As a result, transitions are often difficult for individuals with ASD and Asperger syndrome and may result in increased anxiety and inappropriate or resistant behaviors.

It is not possible to provide a program and environment that are free from transitions and free from change, they are a part of life. The goal is to help the student cope with the changes and to adapt to a variety of settings. In many situations, anxiety can be decreased and inappropriate behaviors prevented or reduced, if the individual is prepared for change and transition. This includes transitions between activities and settings throughout the day, transitions from one grade to the next, transition from one school to another and transition to adult life.

Strategies to Help with Transitions Between Activities and Settings

- Give the student ample warning prior to any transition.
- Schedules can be used to prepare the student for changes in activities. It is important to involve the student in referring to the schedule. This can be done at the beginning of the day, as well as at transition times.
- Outline the schedule using a description of what to expect, e.g., .first _____, then _____.
- Schedules vary in terms of complexity and length, and are tailored to the ability of the individual student. They can be presented in written words, pictures/pictographs or objects that depict certain activities. It is important to implement a method that indicates the completion of an activity, such as turning over a picture card or crossing out an activity.
- A schedule may not be sufficient to prepare the student for change. In some situations, teachers have provided the student with an object which will be used in the next activity or setting to help him/her understand what is coming next.
- The use of a watch, clock or timer may also help the student to understand time periods.
- Social stories are effective in preparing some students for change and particularly for preparing students for new situations and unfamiliar activities.
- The use of visual cues in combination with verbal instructions may help the student to understand what is expected.
- Allow choice whenever possible.

Transitions Between Grade Levels

- When preparing for the transition between classrooms, it is necessary to prepare the student and the receiving teacher. Preparation for transition should begin in early spring.
- The receiving teacher will need to be provided with information about the student's strengths and needs. This can be facilitated through team meeting(s) involving teachers, parents, support personnel and the teacher assistant(s). The receiving teacher may also need to be provided with information about ASD and the educational implications.
- It is beneficial for the receiving teacher to visit the student in the current classroom environment in order to observe the child's participation as well as the current instructional strategies that are effective for the student.
- The student can be prepared for the new classroom setting through the use of social stories and photographs of the new teacher and classroom. It may be helpful to prepare a small scrapbook that the student can refer to over the summer.
- The student may also make visits to the future classroom. It may be helpful for the student to be accompanied by the teacher assistant or current teacher, in order to maintain some familiarity.
- It is also possible to prepare the student with the use of videotapes of the new setting.
- A planning meeting is conducted to exchange information about the student as well as to discuss instructional strategies and approaches that have been most effective.
- Ideally, the meeting involves parents, teachers, teacher assistant, speech language pathologist and others who are involved in the child's program on an on-going basis. This provides the parents and teachers with the opportunity to discuss goals, instructional strategies, curricular modifications, methods for maintaining appropriate behavior and communication.
- It is preferable to conduct the meeting before the end of the current school year. However, some teachers prefer to have additional time to get to know the student. If the receiving teacher has had opportunity to meet and observe the student in the current classroom, and if information regarding strengths, needs and recommended strategies has been exchanged, it is feasible to conduct the planning meeting in the fall.

Transitions Between Schools

The suggestions for transitions between classrooms are also applicable to planning for transitions between schools. However, additional time and preparation may be required, as the student will need to adjust to a whole new building rather than just a classroom. If the transition is from elementary to high school, the student will also need to learn about changes in the way school operates. For example, the student will need to be prepared for the number of teachers that he/she will have, and the various locations for instruction.

- Arrange for the student to visit the school on a number of occasions. If the student is particularly resistant to change, it may be necessary to introduce new aspects slowly, and to go through a process of desensitization and rehearsal. For example, the initial visit may need to be devoted to simply going to the school and going in the front door. On another visit, the student might visit a classroom, then the gymnasium, and later individual classrooms.
- Providing the student with a videotape of the new school and written information (appropriate to the student's academic level) may help the student to rehearse for the change.
- Identify key people that the student can talk to or go to for help.
- Identify peers who may help the student adjust to the new school and who may be able to accompany the student to various locations in the school.

Transition from High School to Adult Life

It is recommended that transition planning from high school to adult life begin as early as possible. The student and parents need time to make the adjustment from elementary school to secondary school. Formal planning for transition to adult life often begins after the first year of secondary school.

Although it may seem that there is ample time to postpone transition planning until the last year or two of secondary school, it is important that parents, advocates, school personnel and adult service providers begin to consider long-term planning for the individual in the following areas:

- graduation or school exit date
- employment options
- post secondary training/education
- income support/insurance
- residential options
- transportation needs
- medical needs
- community recreation and leisure options
- maintenance of family/friend relationships
- advocacy/guardianship

Transition planning is a shared responsibility between parent/guardian, the school and adult service providers. To be effective, the planning process should be a collaborative effort among the student, family, school and adult service providers.

The identification of desired post-school outcomes is the driving force behind transition planning, so the student and family are central to the planning process.

Regardless of the process or format used to conduct the transition planning meeting, the end result should be a section of the student's personal program plan that targets desired outcomes for adult life, specific current needs, a plan for addressing those needs, identification of the agencies/persons responsible and time lines. Subsequent planning meetings will need to be arranged to review the plan, check that specific objectives have been achieved, that the long term goals are still appropriate and necessary revisions are made (Freeze, 1995).

The role of school personnel is to continue to provide opportunities for the student to develop skills for work and independent living. The day to day program and instruction for the student increasingly focus on developing functional skills and community-based training.

The range of expectations will depend on the student's ability and needs. For example, some students with Asperger syndrome may plan to go on to further education following secondary school. Consequently, there will be a greater emphasis on academic preparation in addition to work experience, development of job-related skills and skills for leisure and recreation. For others, the program may focus on work experience, community-based training and self-care.

In general, the school program prepares the student for transition through:

- providing a variety of work experiences to help the individual determine preferences
- encouraging participation in extracurricular activities and social events
- encouraging volunteer work

- helping with developing a resume
- training in social skills for the job place
- teaching appropriate dress and hygiene
- providing on-the-job preparation, once preferences have been established
- training in the use of public transportation
- training in self-care
- training in self-management
- teaching functional academics appropriate to the ability level of the student.