

## 1. Family

The transition to a new school is one of life's milestone events. The added complexity of autism or complex communication provides this with another dimension, and may require additional actions from everyone. Through the transition period, parents and families remain the people who know the young person best, and should expect to be included in transition planning and support. Families play an important role in contributing to the information sharing, but can also have a more valuable role in supporting the emotional wellbeing of pupils.

- Take care of your mental health first. The old adage, "you can't pour from an empty cup" is pertinent.
- Model and incorporate positive mental health strategies in your daily life. Taking time to relax, being mindful and prioritising wellbeing sends the message that these are important things for everyone.
- Expect bumps. There will be issues on the way. Create a support network for yourself, through online groups, parent support groups or friendships. When problems arise, an existing support group can help find solutions and share experiences.
- **Autism West Midlands:** provides community support services for people on the autism spectrum and their families. [Autism West Midlands | Supporting the Autistic Community](#)
- National Autistic Society: A wealth of online information, courses and support for pupils, families, and adults with autism. [National Autistic Society \(autism.org.uk\)](https://www.autism.org.uk)

## 2. Routines

At this transition point, it may be worth considering what elements of routines are important to keep going forwards and which ones may need adjustment. Working with the young person to develop these can increase engagement with them. Consider:

- **Morning routine.** Creating a visual (written or pictorial) schedule may be supportive in developing new morning routines. Consider including visual prompts in appropriate places, i.e., a visual schedule for getting dressed, or brushing teeth in the appropriate place may begin to develop independence. For some pupils, cueing them into the routine by using an object that relates to it may be helpful.
- **Independence.** Are there any tasks that you routinely support your child with that it may be a point to consider developing their skills in? For example, personal hygiene routines, getting dressed, or finding shoes. The transition phase may be an opportunity to build new elements into the routine, or fade out some unwanted ones.
- **Afterschool routines .** Autistic pupils, or those with complex communication needs, may need time after a busy school day to decompress or recover. They may need to plan time on a daily basis for a regulating activity, for example trampolining, or in an environment that matches their sensory preferences. Accepting, valuing and incorporating this time into the day may be helpful in supporting the young person to cope with the increased demands of their next school.

### 3. Route to school

Considering how the young person will get to their new school may be a standard feature of transition work for all pupils, however autistic pupils, or those with complex communication needs, may require additional preparation and teaching of some of the components to this. Developing and practicing these skills before the stress of the new term may be beneficial. Consider:

- Passing the school during journeys to other places, and casually commenting on it.
- Noticing other children in the community who may be wearing the same uniform.
- Starting to travel the route to school in the way that you will in September, whether by foot, car or bus. Notice important landmarks along the way to count down the journey.

### 4. Information sharing, including sensory support

Ensuring that the new setting understands your child's individual profile is key. This should include consideration of their sensory profile, so that any potential difficulties or differences are identified at an early stage, and reasonable adjustments can be made where necessary. Working with school to create a simple pupil profile, in an easily readable format (i.e. a single page) may be helpful. Ensuring the pupil has readily available the materials they need to support their sensory needs may also provide them with reassurance, and discuss with school who will provide these materials and where they will be kept.

The new setting should provide you with information about the school routines, expectations, and sources of support. Further information can be found on the school website. It may be helpful to look through this with your child, if appropriate, and talk about the things they may see.

### 5. Uniform

Starting a new school often includes a new uniform. Hanging up the uniform the night before school to indicate what will happen in the morning can be helpful to prepare a child. Similarly, hang up 'own clothes' for a non-school day. Some things to consider:

- Washing uniform plenty of times before trying it on, so that it softens and smells familiar.
- Ensuring pupil has time to practice putting on/taking off the uniform, particularly if things like buttons or zips are new to them. Staff expect to need to help children when they start school, so don't worry if they can't manage on their own.
- Adapted uniform with velcro rather than buttons may be helpful, or uniform made from softer material, or from a sensory friendly range. For example:
  - [School Uniform \(sensorysmart.co.uk\)](http://sensorysmart.co.uk)
  - [Adaptive Clothing for Kids | Assisted Dressing | M&S \(marksandspencer.com\)](http://marksandspencer.com)
  - [Adaptive Clothing For Kids | Adaptive School Uniform | George at ASDA](http://George at ASDA)
- Discussing with the school the uniform requirements and reasonable adaptations, where necessary.

### 6. Communication

Finding a system of communication with the school that is manageable for everyone, and knowing how to use it may be helpful from the start. School may use an online platform to set homework and communicate with parents. Ensuring that you know how to navigate this, and have the relevant log ins may pre-empt difficulties. In other schools it may be through email communication with a designated person, either the SENCO team, or class teacher.

### 7. Count down

Consider providing/creating a personal countdown calendar, identifying the key dates/point on the way to transition, perhaps through colour coding/adding icons. This can include last day of nursery, family holiday, significant events, transition days etc, as well as the first day at the new school. Crossing off/marking off the dates may help your child see the transition approaching.

### 8. Language

There may be lots of new vocabulary for your child to learn associated with starting school. It may be helpful to think about and use some of there with them prior to starting. Some examples may be:

- Assembly
- Register
- Subjects such as phonics or RE
- Desk
- Headteacher

Simple books or children's programs about starting school may help pupils become familiar with the vocabulary and associated concepts. Where possible support language with a phtograph. Some resources that may support this are:

- [BBC iPlayer - Waffle the Wonder Dog - Waffles Top 5 Tips for Starting School](#): a light hearted look at school life.
- [Play My First Day at School | Starting Primary School | Fun Online Games for Kids | BBC Bitesize - BBC Bitesize](#) a really interactive game exploring some of the school routine
- [BBC iPlayer - Time for School - Songs: Get Ready](#) A song featuring key activities in a morning routine
- [BBC iPlayer - Pablo - Specials: Going to School](#) Pablo, an autistic character, talks about some of his fears and worries about school, and his friends help reassure him.
- [BBC iPlayer - Topsy and Tim - Series 2: 29. First Day](#) Those cheeky twins, Topsy and Tim have their first day at school. Associated book: [Topsy and Tim Start School | BookTrust](#)
- [Harry and the Dinosaurs go to School | BookTrust](#) A book for dinosaur lovers, exploring the first day at school.

## 9. Strengths based positive mental health strategies.

Developing healthy, positive strategies for managing mental and emotional well bring into everyday life may be helpful. Research has shown that focusing on key indicators of well-being can lead to the development of positive attitudes and attributes, leading to greater resilience and improved outcomes in areas such as education, independence, confidence and life-chances. The PERMA approach (Seligman, 2012) prioritises psychological well-being and factors that contribute to this, rather than focusing on areas of difficulty. The model was developed for the general population, but it has the potential to be beneficial for autistic children, or those with complex communication needs, and adults.

<p><b>Positive emotion</b></p>	<p>Providing activities and experiences that generate positive emotion such as joy, gratitude, hope, pride, compassion and love. Additionally, provide opportunities to reflect on these emotions, for example through a journal or photo book.</p> <p><b>In preparation for transition:</b> What activities does your child really enjoy? How can we include lots of this during the transition period so that they are able to regularly experience positive emotions?</p>
<p><b>Engagement</b></p>	<p>Participating in ‘flow’ activities which are completely absorbing and do not allow individuals to consciously process negative thoughts. This is likely to involve pupils pursuing their areas of <b>special interest</b> and using their <b>strengths</b>. It would also include developing the practice of Mindfulness, being fully in the current moment whatever the activity.</p> <p><b>In preparation for transition:</b> Providing time, value and resources for a child to pursue their personal interests, and become ‘lost’ in an activity on a daily basis may be beneficial for positive mental health. Sharing this with them, or alongside them, may enhance this feeling in them. Where a child has a special interest, overtly asking questions and sharing this with them may be helpful.</p>
<p><b>Relationships</b></p>	<p>Being intentional about spending time and developing relationships with significant others. Autistic children may not identify with their class or other group but may enjoy time spent with adults or peers, for example through a lunchtime club.</p> <p><b>In preparation for transition:</b> Consider which relationships may end at the transition point, and how to manage this, for example by collecting some memories in a notebook, or writing a goodbye card. Consider how some relationships may be maintained, for example, by sharing contact numbers with other families.</p>
<p><b>Meaning</b></p>	<p>Research shows that those with a purpose and a sense of value and worth, enjoy greater life satisfaction and may even live longer. How can autistic pupils, or those with complex communication needs, use their creativity, passion and interests to make a positive contribution and be part of something bigger than themselves?</p>

<b>In preparation for transition:</b> Consider how your child participates in activities or	events that include more than just themselves. For some children, this may be sharing an activity with a trusted family member, for others it may include small group activities relating to their particular interests or passions.
<b>Achievement</b>	<p>A sense of pride that comes from working to reach goals and achieving competence and mastery. Set goals that are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time related) and provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on past success and celebrate achievements appropriately and creatively.</p> <p><b>In preparation for transition:</b> Creating a memory book of pre-school experiences and achievements, whatever they are, may enable a child and family to reflect on their personal achievements, and look back on the journey so far.</p>