

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.

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.** What time do we need to be at school? What else needs to happen? Creating a visual (written or pictorial) schedule may be supportive. Consider including visual prompts in appropriate places, i.e., a note by the door to remember a key.
- **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, making breakfast, finding clothes, packing bags etc. Checklists, schedules or electronic reminders may promote independence
- **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.
- **Homework.** An open discussion with the young person, and next school if appropriate, about how, when, where homework is completed may be necessary. A homework club within the school day may be one solution.

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:

- How will they travel? What skills will they need to manage this? Social stories, or YouTube videos can be helpful in preparing pupils for journeys.
- Who will they travel with?
- How will they get help in a crisis? Consider giving the young person a card with what to do if they are out of their depth – this could be as simple as “Call me on 077XXXXXX” Providing a written reminder of this reduces the executive function demands of remembering what to do in a stressful situation, and can provide reassurance.

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 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. This could be in the form of a sensory toolkit, and contain things they need to cope with the sensory demands of school. This may include ear defenders or in-ear noise reducing ear plugs, fidgets, a material with a favourable scent etc.

The new setting should provide your child with information about the school routines, expectations and sources of support. Further information can be found on the school website. Spending time exploring worries, or what ifs..., and providing some written answers can be helpful in managing anxiety.

5. Uniform

Starting a new school often includes a new uniform, and for many schools, the move to the secondary phase may include a more formal uniform. 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 / laces are new to them. 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](#)
- Discussing with the school the uniform requirements and reasonable adaptations.

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 form tutor. There will be an expectation that your child facilitates much of the communication as they move through school, and ensuring there is a support system in place for pupils who may need it can be helpful. Being aware of what communication to expect may enable you to prompt your child – for example, knowing when the cooking sessions are may mean that you can check with them what may be required. Finding a balance between making sure your child is prepared for the day / week and developing their independence and ability to manage themselves is a difficult situation to manage.

7. Organisation

If your child struggles with their executive function, i.e., planning, organising, and prioritising, it may be worth considering ways in which you can support this by providing external sources of organisation. For example, creating a chart outlining what resources are required on which days, alongside a tick list may help. Some pupils may need information for a single day on a list, others may manage the information for the week broken into days. Using smart watches, reminders and alerts may help provide some support in this area. Many apps allow for multiuser connectivity, for example, a shared calendar in outlook would allow a parent to add events/reminders which can then sync with the young person's device. For example:

- [Todoist | A To-Do List to Organize Your Work & Life](#) A task management / prioritisation tool.
- [Best Note Taking App - Organize Your Notes with Evernote](#) Allows collaborative planning and sharing of lists and documents.
- [Outlook – free personal email and calendar from Microsoft \(live.com\)](#) A free resource with many organisational features.
- [IFTTT](#) If this, then that – a tool to manage organisation and prioritising.
- [2Do – GTD, XYZ and everything in between. A powerful task manager. \(2doapp.com\)](#) An app based prioritisation and task management system.
- [Joon: The to-do app for kids with ADHD \(joonapp.io\)](#) A playful, game/challenge based app to motivate and encourage children to complete routine and everyday tasks.

8. 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 school, leavers assemblies, family holiday, significant events, transition days etc, as well as the first day at the new school. Crossing off/markings off the dates may help see the transition approaching.

9. Strengths based positive mental health strategies.

Developing healthy, positive strategies for managing mental and emotional well bring into everyday life may be helpful. Consider completing a strengths-based assessment, such as the VIA survey to identify a pupil's strengths (www.viacharacter.org.) 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 and adults.

<p>Positive emotion</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>In preparation for transition: What activities, clubs or events does your child enjoy doing? How can this continue after the transition to the next school? For the things relating to their first/primary school experience, can we capture some of these, perhaps in a photo journal to reflect on the times that these emotions were experienced? This can be in relation to their personal life or school career. Consider supporting your child to label the emotions they were feeling, if they are not clear.</p>
<p>Engagement</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 special interest and using their strengths. It would also include developing the practice of Mindfulness, being fully in the current moment whatever the activity.</p> <p>In preparation for transition: 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.</p>
<p>Relationships</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>In preparation for transition: Consider which relationships may end at the transition point, and how to manage this, for example by collecting some memories in a note book, or writing a goodbye card. Consider how some relationships may be maintained, for example, by sharing contact numbers or connecting online.</p>

Meaning	<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> <p>In preparation for transition: Consider how your child feels a part of society, and where they are able to contribute and feel valued. This may relate to their personal strengths, and passions. It may include an end of year project at school, or something in the community or online community during the holidays. Sometimes overtly enjoying their passion with them can create some of this feeling.</p>
Achievement	<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>In preparation for transition: Perhaps create some time and space to reflect on the achievements during the first phase of education, whether academic or personal. Thinking about and celebrating the journey can be important in developing a sense of achievement. In addition, perhaps think about some personal goals or challenges for the next phase – what is important for the young person, and how can we help them achieve it?</p>

10. Digital safety

The new phase of school may bring with it new challenges and opportunities with technology. For example, having a mobile phone to support the journey to /from school. This brings many opportunities as well as potential difficulties. For example, many of the features of a mobile phone can support executive function, however the challenges of navigating the digital world also need to be considered. Autistic pupils may need more, and overt, teaching about managing online interactions, and how to 'read' the subtext of some of this communication. Whilst the online world undoubtedly offers opportunities for autistic pupils to connect with others, it also poses additional risks and challenges. Things to consider:

- How/how often will you share the content of their phone in order to support and monitor this?
- What apps will be installed? Many social media apps have age ratings of 13+. Navigating how to help your child feel like they fit in whilst maintaining safety is a difficult balance.
- How can you support passions, for example for particular games/apps, but help maintain a balance with reality? Time limits, protected time, and encouraging them to use the media in the same room as an adult can support this.
- How can you help your teen navigate online relationships, including the concept that some people have malicious intent, and may seek to deceive them. Developing or exploring some online 'rules', such as about sharing personal information can be helpful, as well as providing visual support for this.

Further resources:

- [Autism and the internet: risks and benefits](#) National autistic society article about the risks/benefits of online interaction
- [Keeping children safe online | NSPCC](#) A wealth of general information about online safety. Although not autism specific, this provides valuable information about the issues that may need to be addressed.
- [11-18s | CEOP Education \(thinkuknow.co.uk\)](#) The Child Exploitation and Online Protection website provide good information about the online risks and issues and how to manage them.