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# Autism Agenda



Linn Benton Lincoln ESD-Cascade Regional Autism Program

## Transition Time: Helping Individuals on the Autism Spectrum Move Successfully from One Activity to Another

By: Kara Hume, Ph.D.

All individuals must change from one activity to another and from one setting to another throughout the day. Whether at home, school, or in the workplace, transitions naturally occur frequently and require individuals to stop an activity, move from one location to another, and begin something new. Individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) may have greater difficulty in shifting attention from one task to another or in changes of routine. This may be due to a greater need for predictability (Flannery & Horner, 1994), challenges in understanding what activity will be coming next (Mesibov, Shea, & Schopler, 2005), or difficulty when a pattern of behavior is disrupted. A number of supports to assist individuals with ASD during transitions have been designed both to prepare individuals before the transition will occur and to support the individual during the transition. When transition strategies are used, individuals with ASD:

- Reduce the amount of transition time;
- Increase appropriate behavior during transitions;
- Rely less on adult prompting; and
- Participate more successfully in school and community outings.



### WHAT ARE TRANSITION STRATEGIES?

Transition strategies are techniques used to support individuals with ASD during changes in or disruptions to activities, settings, or routines. The techniques can be used before a transition occurs, during a transition, and/or after a transition, and can be presented verbally, auditorily, or visually. The strategies attempt to increase predictability for individuals on the autism spectrum and to create positive routines around transitions. They are utilized across settings to support individuals with ASD.

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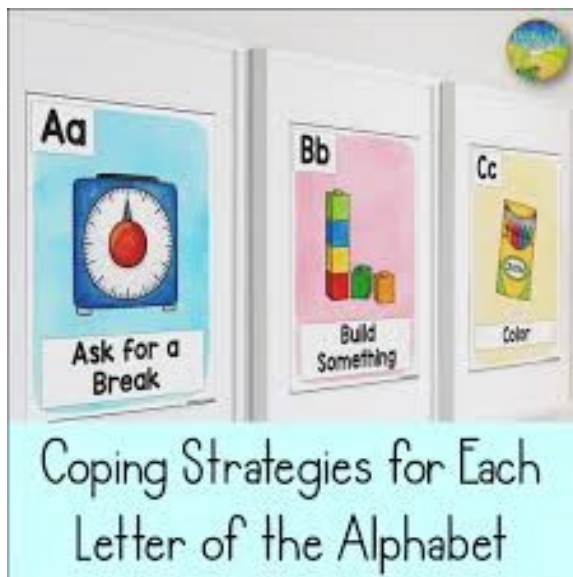
## TRANSITION TIME CONTINUED....

### WHY DO WE USE TRANSITION STRATEGIES?

Transitions are a large part of any school or work day, as we move to different activities or locations. Studies have indicated that up to 25% of a school day may be spent engaged in transition activities, such as moving from classroom to classroom, coming in from the playground, going to the cafeteria, putting personal items in designated locations like lockers or cubbies, and gathering needed materials to start working (Sainato, Strain, Lefebvre, & Rapp, 1987). Similar requirements for transitions are found in the employment and home setting as well, as individuals move from one task to another, attend functions, and join others for meals and activities.

Some individuals with ASD may have difficulties associated with changes in routine or changes in environments, and may have a need for “sameness” and predictability (Mesibov et al., 2005). These difficulties may eventually hamper one’s independence and limit an individual’s ability to succeed in community settings. A variety of factors related to ASD may contribute to these difficulties during transitions.

These may include problems in understanding the verbal directives or explanations that a teacher, parent, or employer are providing. When a teacher announces that an activity is finished and provides multi-step directions related to upcoming activities, students with ASD may not comprehend all of the verbal information. Difficulty sequencing information and recognizing relationships between steps of an activity can impact one’s ability to transition as well. Individuals also may not recognize the subtle cues leading up to a transition (i.e. students packing up their materials, teachers wrapping up their lecture, co-workers getting their lunches out of the refrigerator) and may not be prepared when it is time to move. Additionally, individuals with ASD are more likely to have restrictive patterns of behaviors (per the diagnostic criteria) that are hard to disrupt, thus creating difficulty at times of transitions. Finally, individuals with ASD may have greater anxiety levels which can impact behavior during times of unpredictability, as some transitions are.



Other factors, not unique to individuals with ASD, may impact transition behavior also. The ongoing activity may be more reinforcing to the individual than the activity he/she is moving to, or a second activity may be more demanding or unattractive to the individual (Sterling-Turner & Jordan, 2007). The individual may not want to start one activity or may not want to end another. In addition, the attention an individual receives during the transition process may be reinforcing or maintaining the difficult behavior.

### PREPARATION STRATEGIES

Cueing individuals with ASD before a transition is going to take place is also a beneficial strategy. In many settings a simple verbal cue is used to signal an upcoming transition (i.e. “Time for a bath now”, “Put your math away”, or “Come to the break room for birthday cake”). This may not be the most effective way to signal a transition to individuals with ASD, as verbal information may not be quickly processed or understood. In addition,

providing the cue just before the transition is to occur may not be enough time for an individual with ASD to shift attention from one task to the next. Allowing time for the individual with ASD to prepare for the transitions, and providing more salient cues that individuals can refer to as they are getting ready to transition may be more effective. Several visual strategies used to support individuals with ASD in preparation for a transition have been researched and will be discussed.

*Continued on page3.*

## TRANSITION TIME CONTINUED....

### VISUAL TIMER

It may be helpful for individuals with ASD to “see” how much time remains in an activity before they will be expected to transition to a new location or event. Concepts related to time are fairly abstract (i.e. “You have a few minutes”), often cannot be interpreted literally (i.e. “Just a second” or “We need to go in a minute”), and may be confusing for individuals on the spectrum, especially if time-telling is not a mastered skill. Presenting information related to time visually can assist in making the concepts more meaningful. Research indicated that the use of a visual timer (such as the Time Timer pictured below and available at [timetimer.com](http://timetimer.com)) helped a student with autism transition successfully from computer time to work time at several points throughout the day (Dettmer, Simpson, Myles, & Ganz, 2000). This timer displays a section of red indicating an allotted time. The red section disappears as the allotted time runs out.



Time Timer

### VISUAL COUNTDOWN



Visual Countdown

Another visual transition strategy to use prior to a transition is a visual countdown system. Like the visual timer, a visual countdown allows an individual to “see” how much time is remaining in an activity. The countdown differs, however, because there is no specific time increment used. This tool is beneficial if the timing of the transition needs to be flexible.

Team members deciding to use this strategy need to make a countdown tool. This can be numbered or colored squares, as used in the photos below, or any shape or style that is meaningful to the individual. As the transition nears, a team member will take off the top item (i.e. the number 5) so the individual is able to see that only 4 items remain. The team member decides how quickly or slowly to remove the remaining items depending on when the transition will occur. Two minutes may elapse between the removal of number 3 and number 2, while a longer amount of time may elapse before the final number is removed. Once the final item is removed, the individual is taught that it is time to transition.

### ELEMENTS OF VISUAL SCHEDULES

The consistent use of visual schedules with individuals with ASD can assist in successful transitions. Visual schedules can allow individuals to view an upcoming activity, have a better understanding of the sequence of activities that will occur, and increase overall predictability. A number of studies have indicated that visual schedules used in classrooms and home settings can assist in decreasing transition time and challenging behaviors during transitions, as well as increase student independence during transitions (Dettmer et al., 2000).

### USE OF OBJECTS, PHOTOS, ICONS, OR WORDS

Research has indicated that using a visual cue during a transition can decrease challenging behavior and increase following transition demands (Schmit, Alper, Raschke, & Ryndak, 2000). In one study, photo cues were used with a young boy with autism during transitions from one classroom activity to another, from the playground to inside the classroom, and from one room within the school to another (Schmit et al., 2000). At transition times, the staff presented the student with a photo of the location where he would be going. This allowed him to see where he was expected to go and provided additional predictability in his day. Other formats of information, such as objects, black-line drawings, or written words could be used to provide similar information to individuals. It is helpful for the individual to carry the information with him/her to the assigned location. This allows the individual to continually reference the information about where he/she is headed as the transition occurs. Once arriving at the destination, consider creating a designated “spot” for the individual to place the information, such as an envelope or small box. This indicates to the individual that he/she has arrived at the correct place.

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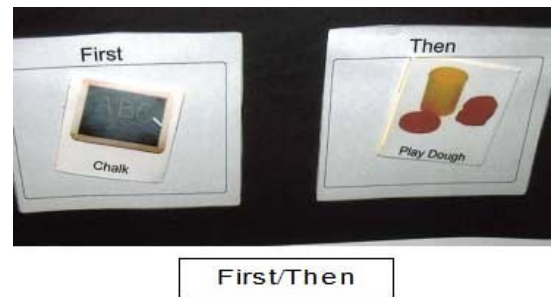


## TRANSITION TIME CONTINUED....

For example, if an individual is a concrete learner handing him an object that represents the area that he will be transitioning to may be most meaningful. If this student is to transition to work with a teacher, staff may hand him a task that will be used during the work time indicating it is time to transition to that location. Another student may be given a photo of the work with teacher area, while a third student may be given a written card that says "teacher". When the student arrives at the teacher area, he may use the task in the activity or place the photo or word card in a designated spot. These cues provide advance notice to an individual and may assist with receptive language (understanding what is being said). Examples of a transition object (a book representing the reading center), a transition photo (picture of the teacher work area and the matching photo located at the teacher table), and a written card (the word "teacher" is given to the student and matched to a corresponding written cue at the teacher area) are below.



Showing a student one piece of visual information at a time during transitions may be helpful for many individuals with ASD. Other individuals may benefit, however, from seeing a sequence of two activities so they can better predict what will take place during the day. It is important for the team working with the individual to assess how much information is helpful at transition times. A "First/Then" sequence of information may be useful—as individuals can see what activity they are completing currently and what activity will occur next. This may help an individual transition to a location that is not preferred if he/she is able to see that a preferred activity is coming next. A "First/Then" should be portable and move with the individual as he/she transitions.



## USE OF TRANSITION CARDS



Other individuals with ASD may find that longer sequences of visual information are more effective in alleviating transition difficulties. These individuals might benefit from the use of a visual schedule that is located in a central transition area in the home, classroom, or employment setting. Instead of the information coming to the individual as discussed previously, now individuals have to travel to the schedule to get the object, photo, icon, or words that describe the next activity or location. If the schedule is centrally located, individuals need a cue to know when and how to transition to their schedules to get information. Using a consistent visual cue to indicate when it is time to transition is beneficial, as concrete cues can reduce confusion and help in developing productive transition routines. When it is time for an individual to access his visual schedule, present him/her with a visual cue that means "go check your schedule". This cue can be the individual's name, a photo of the individual, a picture of something that is meaningful to the individual, or any visual symbol the team selects. The individual is taught to carry the visual cue to his/her schedule, match the cue in a designated location and refer to the schedule for the next activity. Using the visual cue regularly helps individuals predict the transition routine. The visual cue may be more salient and meaningful to the individual than repeated verbal cues. Examples of transition cues, including visuals that read "Check Schedule" and match to a corresponding pocket above daily schedules, and a picture of Barney that serves as a transition cue for a young girl (who also matches it to a corresponding pocket near her daily schedule) are below.

*Continued on page 5.*

## TRANSITION TIME CONTINUED....

### "FINISHED" BOX

Another visual transition strategy that can be used before and during a transition is a "finished" box. This is a designated location where individuals place items that they are finished with when it is time to transition. When it is time to transition it is often helpful for individuals to have an assigned location to put materials prior to moving on to the next activity. The box may be located in the individual's work area as well as in any center of the classroom or room in the home, and can be labeled with the word or a visual cue to indicate its purpose.

Research indicated that the finished box, in combination with several other discussed visual strategies, was helpful during transitions from work time to free time for a young student with ASD (Dettmer et al., 2000). When work time or free time was finished (as indicated by the Time Timer) the student was instructed to put his items in the finished box before transitioning. This assisted in creating a clear and predictable transition routine which decreased transition time and increased positive behavior. Similarly, team members may decide that a "To Finish Later" box may be appropriate for an individual with ASD. This may be used during transitions when an individual has not had time to complete an assigned activity. Often, individuals with ASD may prefer to complete an activity before moving on, and this may not be possible due to time constraints (i.e. family member has an appointment to attend, it is time to go to the cafeteria, the work shift is over). In these cases, establishing a location where the individual knows he/she can find the materials to finish up at a later time or date may be helpful.



### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PLANNING FOR TRANSITIONS

Along with developing predictable and consistent transition routines, team members may also need to consider adjusting the activities that individuals are transitioning to and from if transition difficulty continues. Factors such as the length of an activity, the difficulty level, and the interest level of an individual all may contribute to transition issues. Similarly, if an area is too crowded, loud, over stimulating or aversive for some reason, individuals may resist transitioning to that location. A review of environmental factors that could contribute to transition difficulties is also recommended. In addition, the sequence of activities may need to be reviewed. Team members may benefit from reviewing the activities required of the individual throughout the day and categorizing them as preferred, non-preferred, or neutral. If the individual has difficulty transitioning it may be wise, when possible, to strategically sequence certain activities so individuals are moving from non-preferred activities to preferred activities and from preferred activities to neutral activities. Though this certainly may not be possible for all of an individual's transitions, it may alleviate some transition challenges.

It is important for the team to continually assess how transitions impact individuals with ASD. Depending on the activity, environment, and the specific needs and strengths of the individual, a variety of transition strategies may be appropriate. Through the use of these strategies, research shows that individuals with ASD can more easily move from one activity or location to another, increase their independence, and more successfully participate in activities at home, school, and the workplace.

<https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/articles/transition-time-helping-individuals-on-the-autism-spectrum-move-successfully-from-one-activity-to-another.html>



## 7 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE A SMOOTHER TRANSITION

### 7 Ways to Encourage A Smoother Transition in Young Children with Autism

Do you want to facilitate a smoother transition for your child or student with autism? I'm sure you have wondered why transition breakdowns occur so often and how you can help! These 7 strategies can help make transitions smoother for your little ones with autism. First things first. As an educator or therapist, it is imperative to start by building a positive relationship with your student. If you don't have a positive relationship, helping a child do hard things (like transition) is going to be even more challenging. Next up, what is a transition? A transition can look like: a child moving between activities, moving between different areas in the classroom, or between different areas in or out of the building. Sometimes the breakdown in the transition occurs when it is a move from a highly motivating activity to a less preferred activity. Sometimes the transition might break down when a child doesn't understand where they are going. At home, transitions can include: waking up in the morning, getting dressed, having to be done playing with certain toys, leaving the house to go to school, and getting ready for bed. Fostering a smoother transition requires some special techniques, consistency, and patience.

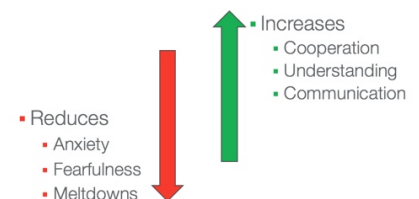
### WHY ARE TRANSITIONS HARD FOR LITTLE ONES WITH AUTISM?

Transitions and change can be difficult for ALL children (and adults!). But, for autistic children who have the tendency to become very engaged in the activity that they are doing, transitions can trigger meltdowns. It can be hard to "switch gears", especially when they thrive on consistency and routine. When autistic children are forced to switch gears without support, it can cause extreme stress and anxiety. Our job is to figure out how to prepare children for a smoother transition. We can help make transitions more predictable and routine-based. Some of the [visual supports included in these tips can be found at no cost here](#).

### SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS IN CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

The best way to start thinking about how to support transitions in autism is to plan ahead, be prepared and be consistent. When the following strategies are implemented and used on a regular basis, it adds some structure and predictability to transitions. It doesn't mean that you will never see another meltdown or resistance during transitions, but you should certainly see a reduction in stressed reactions during transitions. I always like to look at it like this...if I was sitting down reading a really good book and someone came and grabbed the book out of my hand and took it away without warning, I would be pretty upset. Quite often, this is how our students with autism feel...like we pulled out the rug from underneath them during many transitions throughout the day. We need to PREPARE our students/children for transitions ahead of time when possible. When you think about parenting a typically developing child, you might give a verbal warning of "two minutes, then clean up". But, for children who aren't processing auditory input effectively, this cue may be totally meaningless. That is where visual supports come into play. Each of the 7 strategies that I will share have a visual component to them. This is because we know that autistic children tend to be visual learners. We need to provide the preparation for transitions in a visual and predictable format. It is also very important to have these visual supports in several places around the classroom or home so they are easily accessible to you. Then, you will be prepared.

#### Visual Supports for ASD



Continued on page 7.



## 7 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE A SMOOTHER TRANSITION CONTINUED...

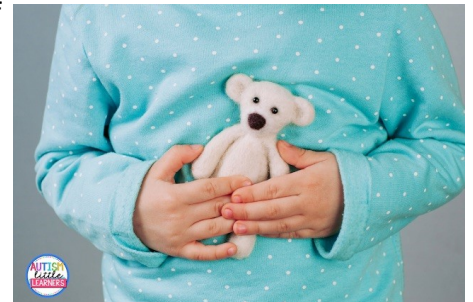
### TRANSITIONS AND AUTISM STRATEGY #1:

Use a first-then board or visual schedule. A first-then visual support shows children the sequence of what they will be doing. It can be the starting place, before using a longer visual schedule. Simply bring the first-then board to your child/student, point to, and say what is on each picture. This is a great way to prepare them for the upcoming transition. For example: if my student is at the table eating a snack and I know we will be transitioning to a 1:1 learning time next, I will have the first-then near them and bring it to their attention a couple of times during snack. "First snack, then green table". A visual schedule will have a longer sequence of activities. Many students start with a "first-then" board and then move on to a visual schedule that shows a sequence of 4-5 activities. Beyond that, many children are able to move to a half-day or full-day visual schedule.



### TRANSITIONS AND AUTISM STRATEGY #2:

Utilize a transition object. A transition object is just an object of any kind that can be carried in one hand by a child. It could be a toy or other favorite object (stuffed animal, matchbox car, brush, etc...). The student may have a favorite little toy that they bring to school, or it can be something from school. They could use the same transition object all day long, or you could offer something different for each transition that you anticipate could be difficult or stressful. Simply show your student the picture of what is next, and hold out the transition object for them to hold as they make that transition. Transition objects can reduce stress and anxiety, as well as shift the child's attention from the activity they were doing.



### TRANSITIONS AND AUTISM STRATEGY #3:

Use a wait mat. What do you do when your student is carrying a transition object, but it is getting in the way of paying attention during a 1:1 learning session? Using a "wait mat" can provide a structure/system and create a routine around letting go of the object during learning time. This is different from the all-done bucket (strategy #6) because the child doesn't have to be all done holding the object. Instead, it is just a short break from holding it. Simply set the object on the wait mat and let the toy "watch" your student do his or her work. Once they are done, they can have the object back again!



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## 7 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE A SMOOTHER TRANSITION CONTINUED...

### TRANSITIONS AND AUTISM STRATEGY #4:

Give some wait time. Why are we always in such a hurry? I know, I know ... in the classroom, you have some pressure to keep the schedule moving along. However, if your student has dropped to the floor and isn't moving to the next activity or place, sometimes the best approach is to wait. Let them have their moment to be upset, regroup, and calm down. This is a great time for you to brainstorm what other strategy might help redirect them to thinking about something else. Sometimes they just need a hug. Sometimes they just need some quiet. There is no harm in just waiting them out for a while and moving on when they are ready. This is a very under-utilized strategy!



### TRANSITIONS AND AUTISM STRATEGY #5:

Use a timer. As an activity is coming to an end, it can be very helpful to use a timer to signal that it is finished, thus time to transition. This can help provide that consistency and predictability for students, which leads to a smoother transition. A beep from an inexpensive kitchen timer works great (unless your student exhibits sensory defensiveness and the sound is too much for them). Usually, the kitchen timer works well because the beeping provides that cue to help the student shift their focus. You can use a visual timer if that is what works best for the child.



### TRANSITIONS AND AUTISM STRATEGY #6:

Make and use an all-done bucket. The all-done bucket is a magical strategy! Once a child learns how to use it, it can help SO much! When it is time to be all done with a toy or an activity, bring the all-done bucket to your child or student and help them put the object in the container. This works with toys, tablets, playdough, crayons...almost anything! After you have facilitated the use of this consistently, all you will need to do is put the all-done bucket in front of your student and they automatically place the object into it. I've seen it work over and over again. The key is to introduce it and use it consistently so that it becomes a predictable routine. The use of an all-done bucket has greatly reduced stress over being "all done" with certain items with my students.



Continued on page 9.



## 7 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE A SMOOTHER TRANSITION CONTINUED...

### TRANSITIONS AND AUTISM STRATEGY #7:

Use a star chart. This star chart is used to count down time. It is NOT a chart to “earn” or “lose” stars. Using a star chart is a form of duration mapping. It provides a visual way to countdown time to something. I use this every day on the playground and during our gym class when we have free time. This is how it works: take all of the stars off, and place the picture of what is next at the end of the chart (this could be a “check” to indicate “check schedule”, or it could be a picture of the activity that comes next). Then, as time goes on, my staff and I walk around and show our students, “one star....four more then \_\_\_\_\_” as we place a star on the chart. The nice thing about counting down time with the star chart is that we can make it go as slow or fast as we want to. We aren’t bound to a timer with an exact number of minutes. This comes in handy when a student is showing signs of stress and we need to end the activity on a positive note. We can hurry up and put the stars on and move to the next activity. The opposite is also true. If everything is going smoothly, we can extend the activity by putting the stars on more slowly. Continue putting the stars on and showing all of your students when each new star is on the chart. With repetition and consistency, they will start to understand what this means and it will better prepare them for the transition when it is time to shift gears. I LOVE this strategy!



### COMBINING THESE STRATEGIES FOR SMOOTHER TRANSITIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

As you may have guessed, many of these strategies can be used in tandem when supporting transitions in your students with autism. For example: If I am working 1:1 with a student, I show them the first-then board. First learning time, then toy cars. Once they finish their work, I say “learning time is done, time for cars!”, as I refer to the first-then board again. After a few minutes, I set the timer for 2 minutes and say “two minutes, then check schedule”. Once the timer beeps, I offer the all-done bucket for them to put the cars in and hand them a picture of a “check” to go check their schedule.

Click here to grab a [free set of visual supports](#) that include the visuals for a first-then board, all done bucket, star chart, and wait mat!

[Click here](#) to watch the free FB Live mini-training on the topic of encouraging smoother transitions in young children with autism.

<https://autismlittlelearners.com/smooth-transition/>

## MOVING FROM PRESCHOOL TO KINDERGARTEN

# Moving from Preschool to Kindergarten: Planning for a Successful Transition and New Relationships

By: Beverly Vicker, M.S., CCC-SLP

Leaving preschool to enter a more formal educational system represents a major transition for every parent and their child. The environment will be new, the challenges will be different, and new relationships will need to be formed. While parents of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) may initially approach this time with trepidation, this transition really represents a time of new opportunity for learning and the development of new friendships and relationships.

Some suggestions for parents to insure a more successful and less stressful transition include the following:

- Parents may wish to talk to the preschool teacher about how they can best prepare their child for the new curricular/environmental demands of kindergarten.
- Parents can look on line for their state Department of Education and check the standards for kindergarten; this will help parents be aware of the focus of the standard curriculum and know where their child will need additional assistance or adaptations. This will also help parents to become aware of areas where they might do additional home instruction or practice, with direction from the classroom teacher, once the new school year has begun.
- Parents may wish to check the website [www.getreadytoread.org](http://www.getreadytoread.org) for a checklist about having home support for early literacy development. The site also contains a screening test and is sponsored by the National Center for Learning Disabilities.
- Parents will want to inform the local director of special education via a letter that they will be enrolling a child with special needs for elementary school programming. List the special needs of the child such as challenges with understanding and/or using language, medical issues, the need for a nap, drowsiness during specific times of the day, sensory needs and sensory distractions, responsiveness to visual supports such as schedules, impulsiveness, need for structure, need for supervision, difficulty attending in a noisy environment, and so forth. More detail can be furnished when the parents prepare a file folder specifically for the teacher. A bulleted format may make it easier for everyone to notice each need.
- The notice to the special education director may result in the scheduling of one or more assessments. Further assessment may not occur if the child has attended the public school pre-school program of that district. You will be given a booklet about your rights under the federal law about special education services. You may wish to do more reading about the topic of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and a child's individualized education program (IEP). Public libraries and special centers such as the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community have materials available for checkout.
- An individualized education program (IEP) meeting will be scheduled to discuss your child's needs, goals, and school/classroom assignments. Parents are members of their child's educational team that considers options and how to best accommodate specific needs.
- During the IEP meeting, parent will want to ask if the local special education district has an autism consultant(s). Find out who will provide support for your child's school, the type of support offered, and how to contact this individual so she/he can possibly assist the classroom teacher before the school term begins. Ask when training on ASD will be provided to the appropriate staff, if needed. As more children with ASD are entering public schools, more people have already had some training. Training is frequently offered after aides have been hired for the school term. The training might occur after the school year has begun.

THINK

PLAN

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## MOVING FROM PRESCHOOL TO KINDERGARTEN CONTINUED...

- Parents will want to tour the new school and meet the new principal. A formal appointment should be made with the principal so he or she has the time to begin cementing a positive relationship with the family. With advance preparation, the principal will be able to tell the parents about school rules and operations and how parents can be involved in the life of the school through volunteering, organizations, and support for school functions. He or she may be able to make arrangements for taking photos or a video that may help with orientation for the new student. A formal tour of the school may best be delayed until near the start date of school. The principal can suggest an appropriate date.
- Parents may wish to have their child become accustomed to the new playground before the transition, if the playground is open to the public during non-school hours.
- Parents will want to prepare a portfolio that contains easy to read information on their child. This is the time to supplement the material already prepared for the director of special education. List strengths, challenges, likes, dislikes, supports needed and why, and specific strategies for problem behaviors. Keep the file content down to 2-5 pages of information. If the teacher is known prior to the end of the pre-school year, the family may wish to give the teacher the file and some references for books and DVDs/videos about autism spectrum disorder in case the teacher wishes information or wishes to become more familiar with ASD over the summer. Also give a copy to the autism consultant, if there is one assigned to your child's school. In fall, offer folders with the same information or portions of it to any person who would benefit from the information (e.g., music teacher, aide, occupational therapist, principal.) Include your phone number and email address. Indicate that you are always willing to cooperatively problem solve about your child's challenges. Indicate that you always also appreciate hearing about your child's successes.
- Parents may wish to check with their public library for children's books and videos that might be available about starting a new school year and kindergarten. Some potential titles for books can be obtained from the websites of chain booksellers and information about a video can be obtained from the site <https://teachingstrategies.com/>. Parents may wish to preview all material to see if any segments might be helpful for a generic advance preparation for their child.
- As the big day approaches, parents can send a note to the teacher. Offer to help him/her develop a picture schedule for the week. If the teacher has not previously had students with ASD, emphasize how having a schedule will make life easier for both her/him and your child. Enclose a sample schedule so there is no miscommunication. Of course, if the child hasn't already been taught to use a schedule at home or at pre-school, then teaching this new skill on the first day may not be practical. Check if the teacher has any questions. Ask what might be a convenient time for the student with ASD to meet her/him before school starts.
- Parents will wish to establish an acceptable means and frequency of communication with the teacher. Let the teacher know what information is helpful for home. Be understanding if the teacher is unable to furnish more than a quick sentence or check-offs on a chart at the end of a day or week. Dismissal time is chaotic. Perhaps he/she can email you with a little more information at a more convenient time but perhaps not on a daily basis.
- Parents should ask how to best support the teacher in general. They may volunteer to provide some training on ASD, lend books, help on field trips, do the classroom newsletter, cut out materials, and so forth. More specific to their child, they can offer tips on how to handle specific situations. The home environment is different than school and sometimes the same strategies will not work. It will often take time for the relationship with school staff to grow.
- It may also take time for the school staff to realize that the parents care about all children and not just their own, that parents want the school experience to be positive and productive for everyone, and that they have some expertise about their child that may help a given situation.



Keep a positive attitude about this new step for your child. Everyone really does want this to be a successful transition for your child.

<https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/articles/moving-from-preschool-to-kindergarten-planning-for-a-successful-transition-and-new-relationships.html>

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## GOING TO MIDDLE SCHOOL

# Going To Middle School

Contributed by: Beverly Vicker

Starting middle school is stressful for any student, but The process can be even more challenging for a student on The autism spectrum (asd) and for his or her parents. Many things will be different. The school will probably be larger, the campus more confusing and the enrollment may be several times greater than in elementary school. The student likely will not know his or her new teachers and, in turn, the teachers might not know anything about the student. The aide, if one is needed and provided, may be a stranger. Many of the students will not know their classmate with ASD.

In any given class, the student may find no familiar faces. The student might change classes not only every period, but sometimes may have certain classes for only a semester, a quarter or on alternate days. There will be greater demands for independence in terms of work habits. The homework assignments will be more complex and involve more hours of work. There will be different and more complex social demands within the cultural setting of the school and during extracurricular activities. But, there also are new opportunities that were not available in elementary school. Careful planning can make the transition to middle school a success. Planning for the transition process ideally will begin several months before the actual transition occurs. Following is an outline for a process that others have used in developing a successful transition plan. Of course, additional steps may be needed in individual cases.

### Step I. Preparation during the last year in elementary school

It's a good idea for the elementary school team to visit the middle school to:

- Meet teachers and administrators in the middle school
- Learn about important differences between elementary and middle school, and about new expectations
- Obtain some of the middle school textbooks or course outlines to help determine placement when levels of classes are offered
- Obtain information about school policy, traditions and so forth
- Obtain information for parents about the new school, including its faculty, opportunities, challenges, rules and traditions
- Develop a list of important skills that the student might need in the new school environment

*Middle School:*  
**VISIT DAY**

### Step II. Planning the curriculum, goals and schedule for the fall transition to middle school

The elementary school team can:

- Gather information, prior to the individual educational program (IEP) meeting, about the student's strengths, challenges, interests, and need for technology, support and accommodations/modifications
- Discuss a potential schedule with the parents and the receiving middle school team regarding the student's need for balance in his schedule, breaks and opportunity for resource support. Sensory challenges also must be considered as the schedule is designed
- Develop a list of helpful strategies, a student portfolio or a video that shows the student's personality and strengths

Continued on page 13.

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## GOING TO MIDDLE SCHOOL CONTINUED...

### Step III. Preparing the Parents The elementary school team can:

- Discuss with parents how they can assist their child over the summer to become ready for the transition
- Share materials to familiarize parents and the student with the new school (e.g., map, student handbook, lunch menu, yearbook)
- Discuss how parents can communicate with the new teachers to ensure an easy transition; provide information about school activities and faculty expectations regarding homework
- Identify parent support and booster groups so that parents can become involved in school-sponsored activities
- Remind parents of school personnel serving as the case manager or primary contacts, and establish contact
- Discuss developing an ongoing means of communication with the middle school contact person and other staff

### Step IV. Preparing the Student The parents or school team can:

- Write a social story or series of stories to help the student prepare for the change
- Allow the student to have as many visits to the new school as needed
- Practice walking the route to classes while the building is empty, or even make a video
- Identify important areas, including a safe haven, bus stop, homeroom, bathrooms, cafeteria and gym
- Provide opportunities to practice opening and closing his or her locker
- Help the student understand school rules (even the unwritten ones)
- Review the yearbook to familiarize the student with the faculty and school activities during the year
- Take the student to parent-student orientation
- Practice scripts so that the student knows where to get help and how to ask for assistance
- Practice requesting to go to a quiet place to calm down; practice the route to get to that place
- Prepare the student to understand that each teacher has different rules and procedures, and that the student will need to be flexible with each teacher's rules
- Buy a special notebook with dividers that will help the student stay organized
- Ask for orientation and mobility training at the IEP meeting (Sayers, 2006)
- Ask for assistive technology, such as a tape recorder, for documenting the student's homework (Sayers, 2006)
- Ask for a laptop computer, such as an Alpha Smart, to assist a child with poor writing skills (Sayers, 2006)
- Arrange a carpool with another student(s) so that the child with ASD is not walking into school alone (Sayers, 2006)
- Obtain books and other resources about middle school issues and social rules (Sayers, 2006)



**I'm going to  
Middle School!**

Continued on page 14.

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## GOING TO MIDDLE SCHOOL

**Step V.** Preparing the staff- The middle school or autism support team can:

- Inform the teaching staff as soon as possible that they will be receiving a student with ASD
- Plan how teachers will be prepared, informed and supported
- Provide staff with an information packet that includes the names of videos, books and web sites about ASD
- Identify whom to contact if staff have questions or problems
- Identify an older student who can serve as a mentor to the student with ASD during the new school term; have the children meet and spend some time getting acquainted prior to the start of school
- Assist staff and aides so they are ready with adaptations/ modifications for the first week
- Advise staff that they will need to closely monitor comprehension of material, since many students with ASD excel at memorizing information without processing or understanding it
- Plan to meet often as a group/support team to proactively and quickly solve problems
- Discuss expectations with parents regarding the amount of homework and their role in meeting due dates and completing assignments
- Negotiate the best method of quick and reliable communication between parents and school personnel



While this list is geared toward the needs of the student who will be active in the general education classroom, many of the same steps are appropriate for the student who will be in a more restrictive program. This list is not all-inclusive, and individual steps should be added to meet the needs of specific students and their school system. Many of the same strategies will be needed when preparing for the transition from middle school to high school.

[https://www.autism-society.org/wp-content/uploads/files/2014/04/Transition\\_to\\_Middle\\_School.pdf](https://www.autism-society.org/wp-content/uploads/files/2014/04/Transition_to_Middle_School.pdf)



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## TRANSITIONING MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

# Transitioning Your ASD Child into Middle and High School

By [Annette Nuñez, PhD](#)

Transitioning from any break back to school can be difficult for children with autism and their families. However, transitioning to middle or high school can be extremely challenging.

Your child is not only transitioning to a new environment, but they are working with new teachers, a new team of specialists, and having to adjust to a new schedule. Not to mention being introduced to multiple classes, lockers, and more students.

All the changes can be overwhelming and anxiety-provoking not only for children but for their families as well.

During this time you may see your child regress in which they may act out behaviorally, or they may engage in more self-stimulatory behavior.

Rest assured that your child is not regressing, they are just communicating to you that they are anxious about the new changes that are happening in their life. By giving your child time, structure, and exposure your child's anxiety to this new change can be reduced.

Below I have listed 5 strategies that have been very helpful to children and their families during this huge transition.

### 1. TALK, TALK, TALK

Begin to talk about this transition as soon as your child finishes elementary school. Many parents wait to talk about this big transition until a week or two before the new school year starts. Waiting can cause anxiety within your child.

Talking about the transition right when summer break begins allows your child to get used to the idea of starting a new school and you can discuss any questions or concerns your child may have about the new changes.

### 2. CREATE TRANSITION VISUALS

Create a "Countdown Calendar" that counts down the days until your child transitions to middle or high school. Also, make a [social story](#) around this transition. The social story should include pictures of the new school including classrooms, the gym, the office, bathrooms, the cafeteria, and your child's locker.



It should also include pictures of your child's new teachers, specialists, aides, and familiar faces such as peers from your child's previous school. Go over this social story once or twice a day so your child has lots of exposure to their new school and the new adults in their life.

### 3. VISIT THE SCHOOL

Contact your child's new school a month before school starts and ask if you and your child can visit the school. Also, get in contact with your child's special education coordinator and ask if you can have a copy of your child's schedule.

If possible, go as many times as you can to the new school and show your child where the bathrooms are and where the cafeteria is. Map out your child's schedule and walk from class to class so that way your child knows their schedule and where their classes are.

*Continued on page 16.*

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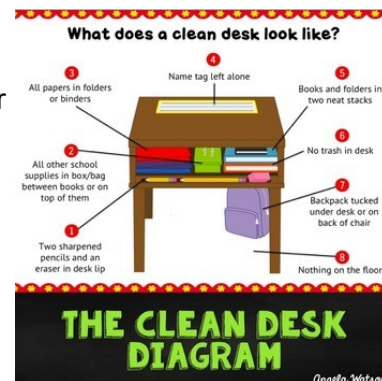
## TRANSITIONING MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL CONTINUED....

### 4. STAY ORGANIZED

Buy different colored binders with dividers and then label each binder with your child's class. For example, the red binder can be labeled as Math, the green binder can be labeled Language Arts, etc. Tape a copy of your child's school schedule on the cover of each binder and highlight the class that corresponds with that binder subject.

In addition, buy a pencil pouch for each binder and put the necessary school supplies that your child will need for that class in that pouch. For instance, in the Math binder you may want to put pencils, an eraser, and a calculator in the pencil pouch and for Art you may want to put a pencil and colored pencils in the pouch.

Then during one of your school visits organize your child's locker by putting the binders in the order of your child's class schedule. This organization will help your child out greatly and teaches them how to manage multiple classes without overwhelming them.



### 5. MAKE MODIFICATIONS

The purpose of middle and high school is to teach independence, but it is important that your child is successful within this new independence. If your child is having trouble opening their locker, ask to take the lock off. If your child is having trouble carrying books and binders from class to class ask if they can leave their materials in the classroom.

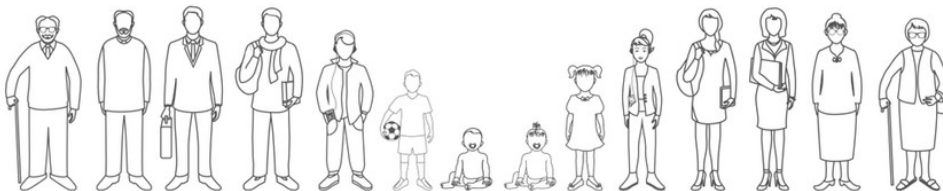
If your child is having trouble taking notes in class, ask if they can get printed notes. If the changing class period is too overwhelming for your child, then ask if they can leave class early to avoid the crowd during changing period.

The point is that you want your child to be comfortable and successful in their new school environment and if something isn't working for your child, you have the right to change it to make it work. Anything can be modified.

Transitions can be tough, but when you organize, expose, and prepare your child for a big transition you not only decrease their anxiety but yours as well. With structure, communication, and support from the new school your child's transition to middle or high school will be a success.

Keep in mind that your child is resilient and that change is good because it teaches flexibility, which in itself is the greatest life skill to learn.

<https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/transitioning-your-asd-child-into-middle-and-high-school/>



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## TRANSITION TO ADULthood



### FACT OREGON–Transition to Adulthood

As your child nears the end of high school, you are undoubtedly thinking about their future. FACT Oregon has put together resources that look ahead towards adulthood and the next stages: secondary education, employment, and/or independent living.

To access these resources please go to: <https://factoregon.org/transition-to-adulthood>



TRANSITION TECHNICAL  
ASSISTANCE NETWORK

### TRANSITION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK

Secondary Transition—an exciting adventure or a time of stress and anxiety? For students with disabilities, a positive transition depends on effective, secondary transition planning by a partnership among families, the school, higher education, training programs, employers, and community service providers.

Teachers and school personnel ease transitions by assisting students with disabilities in planning their future. Selection of appropriate, meaningful goals and development of the skills to achieve those goals are the focus of transition planning. But special education teachers often have too much on their plate to find the resources, lessons, and community partners to help them build the bridge between school programs and the opportunities in adult life.

This site is a work in progress. While we are moving resources over from the previous version to this version you can still visit the previous version of the [TTAN Website](#) to access its resources.

Please click this link to access their website: <https://transitionoregon.org/>



### Center for Parent Information & Resources

Life is full of transitions, and one of the more remarkable ones occurs when we get ready to leave high school and go out in the world as young adults. When the student has a disability, it's especially helpful to plan ahead for that transition. In fact, IDEA requires it.

Please click this link to access their website and resources: <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/transitionadult/>

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Helping Children with  
**AUTISM  
SPECTRUM  
CONDITIONS**  
through Everyday  
Transitions

*Small Changes - Big Challenges*

John Smith, Jane Donlan and Bob Smith



## ***Helping Children with Autism Spectrum Conditions through Everyday Transitions: Small Changes, Big Challenges***

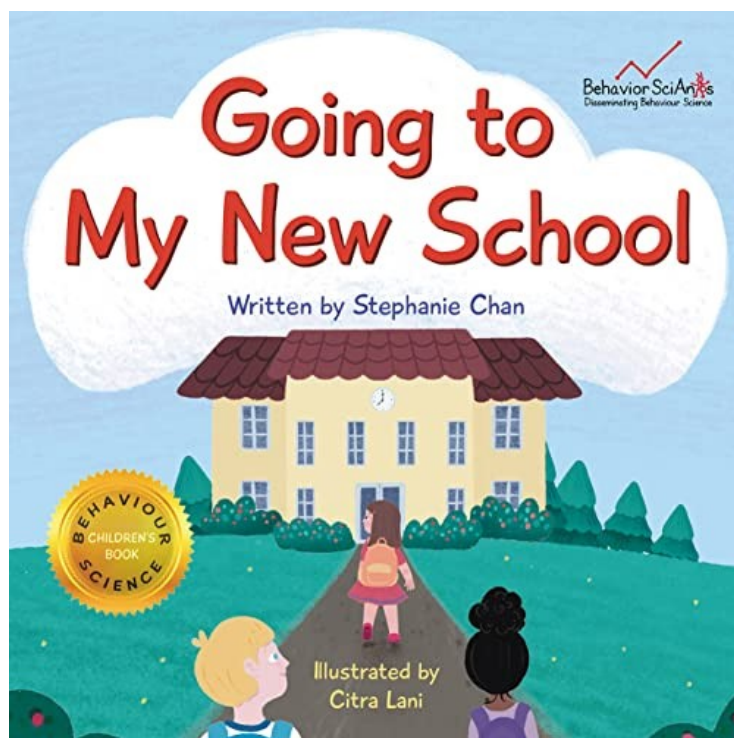
by John Smith, Jane Donlan and Bob Smith

Explaining why seemingly minor changes to routine can be emotionally distressing for children with autism, this book teaches parents practical solutions for coping with common transitions including switching from a weekday to weekend schedule, the changing of the seasons, and sleeping in a different bed when on holiday. With insights from the authors' personal experiences and helpful scripts, signs and sketches to use along the way, this book shows that with planning and preparation, parents can reduce the stress surrounding change for their child and the whole family. This book is the perfect tool to help children with autism deal with change in a calmer and more confident manner and will be essential reading for parents and any professionals working alongside them.

## ***Going to My New School***

by Stephanie Chan

**Going to My New School** is a children's book that targets successful transitions to kindergarten/elementary school for young children! The author has uniquely applied behavior science to children's literature, and helped young readers take the perspective of the main character in the book, explore the new environment, and learn to make good choices, in a fun and interactive way. This book was developed together with researchers, school teachers, early childhood educators, behavior analysts, speech-language pathologists, many parents, and young children! There is a version of this book for boys and a version for girls.



ORPATs: Parent and Care Giver Virtual Trainings: <https://orpat.org/training/get-training/scheduled-workshops/#SW6>

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## VISUALS



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# My Night Routine

1. Get up From Nap



2. Get a Snack



3. Play Game



4. Go Outside



5. Sensory Play



6. Do a Chore



7. Dinner



8. Brush Teeth



9. Bedtime



First

Then



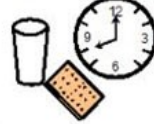
circle time



work



snack time



recess



walk



computer



library



A.P.E



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