

Top Tips for Transition to Secondary School, for students with ASC

Helping you to support a child through change

Transition needs to happen as a series of well-planned events, written into a timetable for the student with ASC. Staff need to be aware that students with ASC may not be able to identify or express their worries and are also likely to find the changes involved very stressful. The sensory processing differences that many students with ASC experience can also contribute to any difficulties, as they become overwhelmed with new sensory stimuli in their new environment. Planning for the final terms of Year 6, the summer between Year 6 and Year 7, and first terms of Year 7 are crucial to success. The schedule should include activities, completed at home and in school, related to developing the student's ability to:

- Reflect on their time at primary school – seeing change as a necessary part of life and as something which is positive;
- Recognise the changes between primary and secondary;
- Make a daily schedule for their new day at Secondary School – put this on the fridge so that the student has time to get used to the new timings and regime;
- Practise and talk through safe travel plans and what to do if trains/buses are late or cancelled, and what they need to do when they arrive at school if late.
- Think about what questions they might like to ask when they go to meet the staff at their new school;
- Think about creating a personalised workspace at home for completion of homework and easy organisation of belongings;
- Identify any issues with school uniform and work to overcome these;
- Prepare for 'Plan B' scenarios (e.g. losing dinner money) – you can record this visually;
- Produce checklists for equipment and uniform to scaffold independence;
- Organise an easy to use wallet and/or key ring for dinner money and locker key;
- Keep a copy of the timetable at home;
- Keep 2 sets of stationery – 1 at home and 1 at school – possibly a spare set in school;
- Colour code books, according to subjects, as per timetable;
- Store materials/homework for different subjects in clear plastic wallets or homework organiser file;
- Examine and address common fears and 'normalise' these. The top ten reported worries young people have about starting a new school are:
 - being bullied
 - not making friends
 - getting lost
 - homework
 - not being able to do the work
 - travelling to and from school
 - not having the right books and equipment
 - not knowing what to do if there is a problem
 - not getting on with teachers
 - getting into trouble.

Meetings with students and their parents/carers should be held at the Secondary School to discuss the young person's strengths and difficulties, and any tools, resources and strategies have been helpful in Primary School. This also provides an opportunity for the student to ask any questions they have. At this time, it would be helpful to:

- Provide the student with a map of the school, school diary, timetable and any other helpful information about the school;
- Use the map to accompany the young person around the school showing him/her where the key areas may be found. It would be helpful if subject/important areas are colour coded. Students can also learn various 'landmarks' that they can use to navigate around the school. Allow them to take photos of these landmarks and areas, such as the new school building, classrooms, canteen, break areas, medical room, library, toilets

and locker area. These can then be used at home to make a booklet about the school which can be referred to over the summer holiday;

- Introduce key members of staff such as the head of year, form tutor, reception staff and medical staff and take their photos to add to the booklet. These introductions could be presented as 'This is where you go if you feel ill, forget your homework, lose your locker key etc.
- Talk through what is likely happen on their first day of school and identify and agree where they are to go on their arrival and who to ask for help if they need it.
- Identify an area for use as a 'safe space' (e.g. specific desk in the library, or SEN area) where the student can go to re-charge at break or lunch time. Any information given needs to be in written format for the student to refer to during the transition period.

The transition period should then continue after starting at the new school:

- the new school environment needs to be discussed, with any new 'Secondary' vocabulary explained;
- all expectations need to be clear, written with visual cues, as appropriate;
- rules need to be explained and procedures demonstrated for:
 - going into a classroom and choosing a seat
 - using their locker
 - buying lunch in the canteen
 - accessing the library
 - queuing up at lunch time in the canteen/sitting down to eat a packed lunch
 - lunchtime clubs/activities/ break time
 - assembly
 - changing for PE, etc.
- the student may benefit from a 'buddy system' with a designated peer or group of peers to help the young person move between classes;
- daily checklists are helpful, if written in the student planner, so the correct items are taken to and from school;
- reminders and support to use their school diary/planner, to help organise information and homework, and to use as a communication system between staff and home;
- ensure that the young person has a 'Go To' person/mentor to help in times of crisis;
- a member of staff to be responsible for keeping the student with ASC in mind, regarding any changes to the normal school routines;
- a 'time-out' card can help when things become too overwhelming. Identify a place for the student to withdraw to, in order to calm down;
- prompt cards can be designed to address specific anxieties;

If I arrive late, I will go to the school office and tell the secretary I have arrived at school. She will mark the register. I will then go to my lesson.

- Resources, such as 'FOCUS ON TRANSITION: Sussing Out Your Secondary School' (£4.99), offer a range of activities, including puzzles, quizzes, writing, drawing, recording and reflecting, and help develop valuable personal skills such as organisation, communication and problem solving, within the context of transition. <http://www.snivelandshriek.com/focus-on-transition-sussing-out-your-secondary-school-student-workbook-97-p.asp>
- Smart moves (SEND) <https://eikon.org.uk/professionals/smart-moves-school-transition-resources/>

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