

Supporting Autistic people during times of change



Our purpose
a different brilliant®

Understanding, engaging
and celebrating the strengths,
interests and aspirations of people
on the autism spectrum.

Transitions are times of change, from major events like starting school or a new job to everyday shifts in routines or activities.

For Autistic people, these changes can be more challenging due to new environments, increased social demands and less predictability. While transitions can support growth, they may also increase anxiety.

This information sheet outlines how planning and support can help make transitions more positive.

Transitions across the lifespan

Throughout life we experience many times of major change, including:

- preschool or home to primary school
- primary to high school
- high school to higher education
- school to post-school options
- new job or work environment
- moving house.

We also go through smaller transitions, including:

- new teachers at school
- new classrooms at school
- new supervisors at work
- change to bus/train route
- new doctor.

Seeing transition as an ongoing process, not just a one-time event, can help and guide in planning ahead and providing support over time.





Why transitions may be challenging

Transitions often involve multiple changes happening at once. For Autistic people, this may include:

- increased anxiety due to uncertainty
- changes to routine and predictability
- new social expectations and peer dynamics
- sensory differences in new environments
- greater demands for independence and organisation
- reduced structure or clarity of expectations.

Challenges during transitions are not a reflection of a person's capability or motivation. They often arise from a mismatch between the individual's needs and the environment.

When environments are flexible, inclusive and supportive, transitions are more likely to be successful.

Key principles for supporting successful transitions

Based on research across the lifespan, effective transition support is:

Collaborative

Transitions work best when families, professionals and the individual communicate openly and plan together. Shared information, joint planning meetings and consistent communication reduce uncertainty.

Individualised and person centred

Each Autistic person has unique strengths, interests and support needs. Transition plans should reflect these, rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach.

Planned and proactive

Early preparation can help reduce anxiety. This may include visits to new settings, visual supports (maps, photos of the environment and people; checklists, schedules), clear information and gradual exposure to change. Sudden and unexpected changes can be inevitable, but planning and warning for these changes as much as possible can help make it more successful.

Focused on both the person and the environment

When environments adapt, individuals are more likely to thrive. Supporting transitions involves:

- creating autism-friendly environments
- providing sensory accommodations
- adjusting communication styles
- building inclusive cultures
- offering autism-specific training.

Supportive of all involved

Parents, carers, teachers, employers and professionals may also need information and guidance. When supporters feel confident and informed, outcomes improve.



Holistic

Transitions affect wellbeing, relationships, identity and inclusion. Successful transitions support a person's sense of belonging and autonomy.

Practical strategies that support transitions

Depending on the stage of life, helpful approaches may include:

- clear, structured information about what to expect
- visual supports (maps, schedules, checklists)
- opportunities to visit new environments before starting
- identifying a "safe person" or mentor to go to if the person feels overwhelmed
- collaborative and regular planning meetings to monitor progress
- sensory accommodations
- gradual introduction to new expectations
- strengths-based goal setting
- support with self-advocacy and help-seeking skills
- autism training for staff or peers.

Whilst these practical strategies can be helpful, it is important to reach out for additional help and support as needed. Therapists, behaviour support practitioners and teachers/support staff can assist with planning transition-based supports across settings.

Additional resources

Autism Education Trust Transition toolkit:

learningsupportcentre.com/content/uploads/2024/10/Autism-Education-Trust-Transition-Toolkit.pdf

Autism Research Institute Autism Transition Resources:

autism.org/autism-transition-resources

Autism Transitions Research Project:

atrproject.org/resources/

Children and Young People with Disability Australia

(CYDA), **Take Charge of Change:** cyda.org.au/takecharge/

InclusionEd, **BOOST-A – an evidence-based tool to guide transition planning for Autistic adolescents:**

inclusioned.edu.au/projects/boost-a