

Transition to School

Guidelines for Parents

Starting school is a challenging but exciting time for all children and their families.

However, for children on the autism spectrum, transitioning to the new school environment may be more challenging and additional support is frequently needed to make this transition as smooth and positive as possible. The good news is that a number of key steps can be taken to make this transition process smoother.

WHAT'S INVOLVED?

- Initial Planning Practices – A Collaborative Approach
- Individualised Transition Plans
- Active Preparation
- Schools started what's next?
- Follow Up Support & Evaluation



Initial Planning Practices

A Collaborative Approach

The process of preparing a child on the spectrum for a smooth transition to school begins with a cooperative partnership between the parents/guardians, schools and professionals, but also from members of the local community and education department staff. The first step as a parent or guardian is finding the right school for your child, but you don't need to do this alone.

A team should be created to assist in the transition to school, including:

- Parents or Guardians – you are the critical member of the team
- You may also want an advocate, interpreter or support worker
- Staff member from early childhood setting
- Early childhood intervention professionals
- Transition coordinator or case manager (assigned from Department of Education in some states)

After identifying the right school for your child, school staff who might join your transition team are:

- School teacher (if known)
- School counsellor
- School principal

Once your team is established, you will meet to work together to identify and develop:

- Transition timeline, this should ideally begin 6-12 months prior to transition
- Funding & Program Eligibility
- Support staff needed
- Formal Transition Plan
- Team members' responsibilities for implementing the plan



Individualised Transition Plan

The Transition Plan provides information on your child's strengths and needs, and how best to assist your child to adjust to and take part in the new school environment. It contains the information shared by you and your family, and advice and recommendations suggested by the early learning support team. This will allow your child and his or her educators to best meet your child's developmental and academic goals.

The Transition Plan should contain:

- Information on your child's diagnosis and the results of any cognitive, communication and daily living skills assessments
- A list of the child's characteristics, across the social, communicative and restrictive behaviour domains, as well as those pertaining to sensory processing and general health information
- Your child's strengths and weaknesses with respect to his/her thinking and problem solving skills
- Your child's abilities with respect to organising and processing information
- How you anticipate your child might participate at school
- How adults can assist your child's engagement (eg. using visual aids, gestures)
- Special interests which may be used for motivation
- Specific challenging behaviours and management strategies
- Your child's fears or behaviour triggers (eg storms or lightning, uncertainty, unexpected changes in routine)
- How your child is likely to respond if scared, anxious, or confused
- School readiness skills: Individualised, achievable goals agreed by the team (eg., being able to unwrap lunch to eat, communicating need for bathroom appropriately)



Active Preparation

Preparing your child for school: What can you do?

Before starting school, it can be helpful to practice routines and skills needed at school. Introduce your child to the daily morning routine of getting ready for school and introduce them more generally to the school itself. The sorts of practices you might introduce in the months leading up to starting school may include:

- Creating a basic daily schedule of simple daily tasks for the child to practice: Getting dressed on time, independent toileting, packing school bag, eating from a lunchbox.
- Practicing as many skills as possible at a variety of locations: Children on the spectrum often have difficulty generalising skills learnt in one place to another and will need to practice skills in more than one context, e.g. independent toileting at home but also at the shops.
- Encouraging communication skills: For children on the spectrum the biggest challenge at school can be communicating with their teachers and peers. Encourage communication by responding to and praising all attempts, and with a range of people. Ensure intake teacher knows how to use any alternative communication systems used by the child (e.g., ipad software).
- Social stories: Talk to your child about what will happen at school, the daily routine, positive experiences such as using play equipment, fun activities, making new friends etc.

Preparing your child for school: What can you expect?

Your transition coordinator should facilitate an introduction to the new school and classroom for you and your child. It is recommended that this include:

- Meeting with Principal
- School visit: You and your child should visit the new school to orient yourselves with the school environment, where the toilets are, how to get a drink, where belongings are kept
- Classroom visit: You and your child should also visit his or her classroom and meet with his or her receiving school teacher if this is known
- Classroom exploration: Exploring the school classroom at times of low stress and with few expectations may assist in making this process less demanding on your child

The staff at your child's early childhood setting and their new school should also be communicating about your child before they commence school. This may include:

- Teacher sharing information: Teachers (sending and receiving) share information about the child
- Sending teacher visit: Early childhood educator visits receiving classroom
- Receiving teacher visit: School teacher visits early childhood setting to observe child



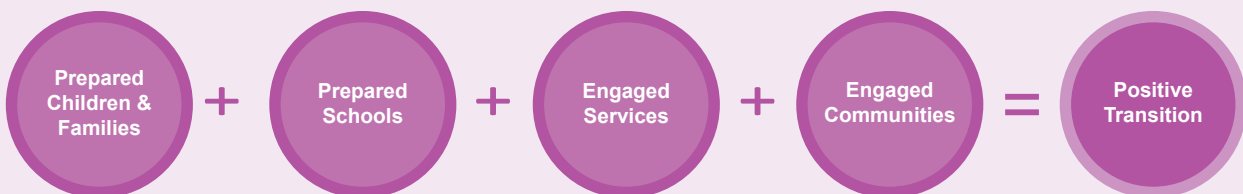
Schools started what's next? Follow Up Support & Evaluation

It is recommended that support and management of your child's adjustment to school continues well into the first year. The transition team should meet again to evaluate and review the transition process. It is also important that you develop an open relationship with your child's teacher and school and ongoing communication should be established, e.g. a communication book – a notebook that families and staff write in daily may assist.

It is also important to know how your child is progressing through the school year. This includes monitoring and evaluating their academic progress as well as:

- Behaviour & Engagement: your child's behaviour (classroom engagement, ability to be calm, attention, motivation)
- Socialisation: your child's social skills, communication skills, peer inclusion and interactions
- Student Teacher Relationship: your child's relationship with the school teacher/s

Starting school is a big step. Following these suggestions can not only make this transition easier but also allow your child to take important steps towards independence. Successful transition to school requires not only you and your child to be ready for school but also your new school community and service providers need to be ready for your child



Appendix

Useful Websites and Resources

ecia.org.au/Transition-to-School

ahrc.eg.edu.au/services/transition-resource/factsheets










Social Story Example

preschoolspeech.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/My-New-School-MJF21.pdf

Routine Visual Schedule Guide

educationandbehavior.com/using-visual-schedules-2/

Routine Visual Schedule Example

7:00	Get dressed		Make bed	
7:10	Eat breakfast		Brush hair	
7:30	Brush your teeth		Try to go to the toilet	
7:40	Put on socks		and shoes	
7:45	Get all school stuff		Get in the car	