

# Transition to School

## Guidelines for Professionals

### Starting school is challenging for all children and their families.

However, for children on the autism spectrum transitioning to the new school environment may be particularly difficult and more support is needed to make this transition as smooth and positive as possible.

To ensure a successful transition for children on the spectrum, there are a number of key guidelines that are recommended:

- Initial Planning Practices – A Collaborative Approach
- Individualised Transition Plans
- Active Preparation
- Follow Up Support & Evaluation



### Initial Planning Practices

#### A Collaborative Approach

The process of preparing a child on the autism 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 in this process is establishing a team to assist the child and his or her family with the transition to school.

#### This team might include:

- Parents or Guardians –the critical member of the team
- An advocate, interpreter or support worker for the parent
- Staff member from early childhood setting
- Early childhood intervention professionals
- Transition coordinator or case manager (assigned from Department of Education in some states)

After this team is established parents/guardians should be assisted in identifying the characteristics of an appropriate school for their child. Once the right school has been identified, school staff should join the transition team such as:

- School teacher
- School principal
- School counsellor

The transition team should then work with the parents/guardians to identify and develop:

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



## Individualised Transition Plan

The Transition Plan provides information on the child's strengths and needs, and how best to assist the child to adjust to and take part in the new school environment. The Plan contains information shared by the family, and advice and recommendations put forward by the early learning support team. This allows the parent and the child's educators to best meet the child's developmental and academic goals.

### The Transition Plan should contain:

- Information on diagnosis and the results of cognitive, communication and adaptive skills assessments
- A list of the child's autism characteristics, across the social, communicative and restrictive behaviour domains, as well as those pertaining to sensory processing issues
- General health information
- The child's strengths and weaknesses with respect to cognition
- The child's abilities with respect to organising and synthesising information
- The degree of participation expected from the child, and details of their social competence
- Behaviours from adults which facilitate engagement (eg. using visual aids, gestures)
- Topics which the child finds particularly interesting which may be used for motivation
- Any difficult behaviours the child currently engages in
- Fears or triggers of difficult behaviour
- How the child is likely to respond if scared, anxious, or confused
- Current successful strategies for managing challenging behaviours
- Readiness skills identification and learning of skills not yet developed
- Individualised, achievable goals regarding developmental milestones, academics, and adaptive skills



## Active Preparation of the Child for Transition

### Preparing the child for school: The Family's Role

Before starting school, it can be helpful to work specifically on some adaptive skills needed at school, introduce the child to a routine which will build up to commencing daily classes, and introduce them more generally to the school. Providing parents with information and guidance on the sorts of practices to begin with their children in the months leading up to starting school can be useful. These might 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.
- For children on the autism spectrum pictorial schedules can be particularly useful.
- 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 be practiced 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 wide range of people.
- Social story: Assist the parents in developing a social story about what will happen at school, daily routine, positive experiences such as play equipment, fun activities, making new friends. Again for children on the spectrum, pictures and visuals aids are particularly useful.

## Preparing the child for school: School and Staff's Role

### Preparing the Family

The transition coordinator should facilitate an introduction to the new school and classroom for the child and his or her family. Visits should be well-planned and the family informed and prepared for these visits. It is recommended that the visits include:

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

Developing a support network for families of children on the spectrum can also be of great assistance in the transition process. This may involve introducing the parents/guardians to a specific veteran parent at the school to support them through the process or facilitating meetings with other parents/guardians of children in the same class.

### Communication & Collaboration

Communication and collaboration between the child's early childhood setting teacher and his or her school teacher prior to

the child commencing school to identify particular skills and competencies that will help the child make a successful transition to school is recommended. This may include:

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

### Preparing the Class

Children on the autism spectrum will experience additional challenges and needs in the classroom and it is important that their teachers and other school staff are provided with the necessary advice, guidance and, where possible, training. In addition to educating and preparing school staff, it is recommended that the child's peers are also informed and prepared for the child's transition to the class.

Appropriately modifying the classroom environment, including incorporating materials specific to the child's needs, can also make the transition more positive. Adjustments to the daily schedule, the curriculum and the delivery of instructions, e.g. the use of visual aids are also recommended.



## After Commencing School Follow Up Support & Evaluation

It is recommended that support and management of the child's adjustment to school continues well into the first year. The transition team should meet again at end of Term 1 to evaluate and review the transition process.

### Open Communication

Open communication is a vital component to successful transition for children on the spectrum. Continuing communication between receiving and sending teachers can assist in problem solving any new challenges that arise in the child's adjustment to school. More importantly an open collaborative relationship needs to be developed with the parents/guardians. Developing communication procedures and documenting communication are suggested, e.g. a communication book – a notebook that families and staff write in daily.

### Skill Maintenance and Development of Child's Skills

Prior to starting school, many children on the autism spectrum may have engaged in intervention programs and it is important to make arrangements for the maintenance of the child's existing skills, but also to provide ongoing support to further develop these

skills. One of the biggest challenges for children on the spectrum is social interactions and communication. Providing guided peer interactions and developing strong student/teacher relationships may improve the child's communication skills, social interaction and school engagement.

It is also important to monitor the child's progress throughout the school year. This includes monitoring and evaluating their academic progress but for children on the spectrum there are other areas that may be even more important, such as monitoring and evaluating the child's:

- Behaviour & Engagement: behaviour (classroom engagement, self-regulation, externalising or internalising problems, attention, motivation)
- Socialisation: social skills, communication skills, peer inclusion and interactions
- Student Teacher Relationship: relationship with his or her school teacher/s



# Successful School Transition is a Partnership

Successfully transitioning a child on the spectrum from early childhood settings to school is a challenging task and a big responsibility for schools and their staff. It is hoped that these recommendations can assist in making this transition a positive one. However, a successful transition requires the collaboration of more than just the child's family, early childhood staff and the new school. The assistance, engagement and advice of support staff (intervention professionals) and the local community can be invaluable. Reaching out and working in partnership with parents and carers and other key stakeholders is recommended to facilitate a smooth and positive transition for children on the spectrum and their families.



## Appendix

### Useful Websites and Resources

[ecia.org.au/Transition-to-School](http://ecia.org.au/Transition-to-School)

[ahrc.eq.edu.au/services/transition-resource/factsheets](http://ahrc.eq.edu.au/services/transition-resource/factsheets)

### Social Story Example

[preschoolspeech.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/My-New-School-MJF21.pdf](http://preschoolspeech.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/My-New-School-MJF21.pdf)

### Routine Visual Schedule Guide

[educationandbehavior.com/using-visual-schedules-2/](http://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