

# Managing Transitions

## Participant Notes

### Transitions

According to the *Macquarie Dictionary and Thesaurus* (1998), transition is the ‘passage from one position, state, stage etc., to another’ (p. 430). For children with ASDs, this passage between states and stages may represent a myriad of changes throughout the day, week, month, term and year. Each child copes with transitions in a different way. Some transitions require more detailed planning than others. What we do know is that difficulties coping with transitions and changes are common among children with autism.

Children with ASDs are confronted by many daily changes, some more difficult to cope with than others. These may include:

- having to stop one activity to start another
- having visitors
- a change to the television program
- a scheduled change of lesson timetable
- an unexpected change of lesson timetable
- having a relief teacher
- hearing the lunch bell, having to stop playtime, and go to the next lesson

There are also other transitions, which occur less frequently, which can also prove challenging for children with ASDs. These may include:

- school year to school year (changing classes, teachers, peers)
- changing schools
- moving house
- birth of a sibling

These changes (transitions) can be very stressful for children with ASDs, regardless of how minor they appear to be (Handley, 2006).

### Why are transitions difficult?

When we consider the characteristics of ASDs, it becomes clearer why transitions are difficult for children. The rigid and repetitive behaviours and thought patterns of children with autism make

adapting to transitions and change difficult. Some children take longer to process and accept change, whilst others may not appear to require high levels of support around change. It is important for parents to identify the impact of change on their child and what strategies/supports have proven to be effective in the past.

### **What transitions does your child encounter?**

Take a moment to consider your own child. Identify the daily transitions that challenge your child at home and school. Then identify other transitions that challenge your child on a less frequent basis, at home and school. Remember to differentiate between daily transitions and other transitions that occur less frequently.

### **Why is transition planning important?**

There is a number of questions that need to be asked to assist in transition planning. The answers to 'Who, What, When, Where and Why' questions will help with the planning process. Transition plans also need to be tailored to the individual and no two plans are the same. Plans for each child will vary in strategies and length. The GROWTH model can be used to assist you in this process.

### **Strategies**

There is evidence that suggests people with an ASD respond better to transition and change when it is supported by a planning process, with involvement from key stakeholders. Because people with autism often require extra time to process information, forewarning helps, as do autism specific supports such as visuals. The level of forewarning and planning for changes required by individuals with autism vary from one person to the next.

Think about times when your child manages change or transitions better than others. Identify the elements that makes these transitions more successful than others. Begin putting these elements into the strategies section of the table.

### **Preparing your child for change**

- Teach your child about change, for example, 'Change is a bit scary but it's ok'. Focus on the positives of change e.g. 'A chrysalis turns into a beautiful butterfly'.
- Provide supports for change e.g. visual routines/sequences, social scripts etc.
- Practise change when your child is relaxed and calm.
- Role play with family members to teach strategies to cope with change appropriately e.g. going to a safe place to calm down.

- Reinforce/reward appropriate responses to change.
- Highlight what will stay the same, for example, the child may move classrooms, but the toilets, library and canteen are still in the same place.

### **Good practice for responding to transitions**

1. *Access information:* ask schools to give you some warning (if possible) when change is going to occur. Ask questions.
2. *Develop a plan:* meet with your child's teacher or as a family to develop a plan to support the transition. What is required, by whom and when? Remember the transition needs of each child is different. Use the GROWTH model to support your planning.
3. *Create supports:* visual sequences, social scripts, sensory supports etc.
4. *Evaluate/review:* was the transition support plan effective? What could have been done better?

### **Resources and References**

Dodd, S., Brennan, L. & Collins, M. (2005). *Transition to school*. Sydney, NSW: Autism Spectrum Australia.

Grandin, T. (no date). *Making the transition from the world of school into the world of work*. Colorado State University.

Handley, E. (2006). *Making change easier: A guide for parents and schools*. South Australia: Autism SA.

LaCava, P. G. (2005). Facilitate transitions. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 41(1), 46 – 48.

## Matrix for a Primary Student with an ASD and Intellectual Disability

	Communication	Social Interactions	Rigid/repetitive behaviour	Sensory	Learning style
<b>Characteristics</b>	Uses 3-4 word sentences, often uses delayed echolalia. <b>Does not understand verbal instructions given to group.</b> Often uses loud voice	Likes to hug classmates, but doesn't like them to sit close to him. Doesn't use others' names.	<b>Tries to hold figurines at all times.</b> Will not use toilet at school if other children are present.	<b>Cries when the bell rings.</b> Always moving out of his seat during class time.	Fantastic rote memory, loves to use coloured pencils. Is motivated by trains and 'Magic Bus' computer program.
<b>Impact</b>	<b>Without 1:1 support, is often unsure of what to do</b> and then engages in non-productive activities e.g. wandering around room. <b>Becomes upset when other children pack up</b> around him.	Limited interaction with classmates most day to day interaction is with adults. Some peers are wary of student.	Limited capacity for learning activities while holding figurines. <b>Cries when figurines are put away.</b>	<b>Is always upset when moving between class and breaks.</b> Reduced time for learning and distracting for others.	Is co-operative when motivated, or preferred things are present. Compliance decreases when absent.
<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Give instructions 1:1 &amp; use visual strips to help understanding of what to do.</b> 'First - then' with preferred activity 2nd as motivation. <b>Pre-warn with a visual support when it is finish time.</b>	Define boundaries of seating place using carpet square. Practise verbal greetings, teach names.	<b>Build time for figurines into routine but limit access at other times using 'finish' box.</b> Use visuals to show when figurines are available and when restricted.	<b>Options to replace bell, e.g. music. Reduce volume of bell. Pre-warn student before bell rings, use picture sequences to support moving in and out of class.</b>	<b>Allow student to colour-in his transition visual supports. Always have schedule board on display.</b> Use computer as 'reward' for completion of non-preferred activities.

## Matrix for a Secondary Student with an ASD and Intellectual Disability

	Communication	Social Interactions	Rigid/repetitive behaviour	Sensory	Learning style
<b>Characteristics</b>	Has language and understanding of a much younger student (8-10 year old). When upset, ability to express feelings is reduced further.	Tends to be silly around other students, especially when class is moving around school.	Extreme interest in the street directory and maps. Will spend ages poring through pages.	Very active, always running, hopping from foot to foot, swinging arms around. Quite clumsy.	Requires concrete tasks. Is currently coping with academic tasks at a primary school level.
<b>Impact</b>	Misses a lot of what goes on in class and yard. Often is in the wrong place at the wrong time.	Other students tend to steer clear.	Access to maps tends to reduce anxiety, but can interfere with school tasks.	Often small injuries and bruises from constant activity.	Can disrupt others when tasks and activities differ from rest of class.
<b>Strategies</b>	Communication by teachers to be modified and supported by visual materials where possible. A daily schedule to be provided including photos of where student should be.	Pre-warn when class is about to move. Support with another student to walk apart from large group.	Use the 'First-Then' approach to gain access to maps. Use school maps and timetables to support student through class transitions.	Provide supervised movement opportunities between activities to assist transitions supported by visual cue cards.	Tasks given should be structured, concrete, and supported visually. Provide choice of quiet activities when student is finished, support by visuals and rewards.

## Matrix for a Primary Student with HFA or AS (No Intellectual Disability)

	Communication	Social Interactions	Rigid/repetitive behaviour	Sensory	Learning style
<b>Characteristics</b>	Very verbal, <b>may not understand what is being said in busy classroom</b> , has difficulty with conversations. <b>Often asks questions repetitively. Level of understanding others' language is low.</b>	Has difficulty understanding actions of peers often feels he is being teased or that actions are deliberate eg if someone brushes against him. Does not have skills to ask another student what homework was set.	Won't participate in any class performances, i.e. at assembly, school concert. <b>Clicks fingers when anxious. Has a tantrum when an unexpected change occurs.</b>	Likes to smell people's hair (shampoo etc). <b>Not able to discern what teacher is saying within noise etc of classroom. Hates the school bell – hands over ears and screws up eyes.</b>	<b>Highly visual learning style.</b> Loves books and reading, learns best from what he reads. Resistant to writing, will only produce minimum requirements.
<b>Impact</b>	<b>May not take relevant books to class. Doesn't know what to do</b> – may get into trouble. Peers sometimes annoyed by questions. <b>Often misses instructions and explanations in class. Sometimes refuses to move from one activity to another.</b>	Can feel sad or angry at school when incidents occur. May be a target for bullying. Can't check with others like peers can.	Misses experience, opportunity for inclusion lost. <b>Regular tantrums in class when schedule is suddenly changed.</b>	Was cute when younger but now looks inappropriate. Makes him a possible bullying target. Misses critical messages. <b>Transitions at bell time are challenging.</b>	Generally happy in class, occasionally 'acts up' to get out of writing tasks. <b>Always behaves better when visual supports are used.</b>
<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Use visual supports when giving instructions and to teach routines.</b> Explicitly point out and explain body language in others, TV etc. Teach correct responses to others' emotions.	Debrief following incidents with visual drawings (comic strips) to help him learn difference between aggression and unintended jostling in corridor. Set up a 'safe place' with favoured books to be used as a retreat if needed. Identify safe/unsafe areas of school for him on a map.	<b>Whenever possible give pre-warning of coming changes. Use visuals to support change warnings. Plan for major transitions in advance. Staff to look for ways to reduce anxiety</b>	Immediate redirection when this is observed. Try to teach what is OK to smell and what is not using a visual chart. Model opportunities of 'good' smelling. Reduce the bell volume. <b>Give warning that bell will sound and what is coming next.</b>	Modify writing tasks to acknowledge difficulties, but also use reward and maintain expectation of an agreed amount. Allocate time for typing tutorial in class. <b>Support all learning and instruction with visual supports.</b>

## Matrix for a Secondary Student with HFA or AS (No Intellectual Disability)

	Communication	Social Interactions	Rigid/repetitive behaviour	Sensory	Learning style
<b>Characteristics</b>	A 'quiet' student'. <b>Often has problems understanding verbal instructions</b> for assignments. Literal. Doesn't understand sarcasm. <b>Level of understanding of others' language is low.</b>	Is often alone, but has found one 'friend' with the same interest in transformers.	Refuses to go over completed work. Doesn't check for mistakes. Says – "I've done it already". <b>Doesn't like to stop a work task until it is completed.</b>	Hates weekly assembly where 600 students present. <b>Hates busy corridors and locker areas at changeover times.</b>	Relative strength in maths and science. Difficulty with English novels. Strong dislike of group work and discussion, prefers to work alone. <b>Visual learner.</b>
<b>Impact</b>	Can be ignored by other students. Often fails to complete homework or does it incorrectly Can be 'set up' by peers. <b>Brings wrong things to class.</b>	Often seen alone in the yard, sometimes comments that he wishes he had friends. Target for bullying.	<b>Is often late getting to next class.</b>	<b>Often anxious at school. Is often late to class</b>	Struggling in English and subjects involving lots of reading. Becomes anxious when asked to choose a group.
<b>Strategies</b>	Where possible give written homework instructions. <b>Teachers to provide visual timeline for longer assignments and check in on progress. All subject teachers to be informed of necessary adjustments by co-ordinator</b>	Investigate the option of starting a 'transformer club' one lunch time a week.	Teacher to model and set 'rules' for going over work. A re-reading step to be included in written instructions. Parents to reinforce at home. <b>Give manageable tasks that can be completed within the lesson time, or break up larger tasks. Warnings when time is almost up and activities are to be stopped</b>	<b>Discuss with student what would help, seat near door? Discreet ear plugs? Move locker to a quieter place. Let student move through corridors 5 mins before the rest.</b>	Limit group work expected and when necessary, teacher to choose the groups <b>Provide visuals to help the student follow schedules.</b>

## GROWTH MODEL

*My daughter, Gabrielle, has autism and an intellectual disability. She hates change and finds it difficult to move from activity to activity. On the weekend and school holidays, she insists on putting on her school uniform and packing her bag and will try to run to school if we do not lock her in the house on the weekend. What can I do to help her to cope better with this transition?*

<b>G</b>	For Gabrielle to cope with a change without running away.
<b>R</b>	Gabrielle has limited understanding of the language of others and can only say a few words. Gabrielle loves structure and routine. She likes to know what is happening next and particularly likes the visual timetable at school. Difficulty understanding time concepts. Weekends and holidays are relatively unstructured. Gabrielle loves the swing at school.
<b>O</b>	Provide a visual that explains which days are school days and which days are for staying home. Give warning of the morning activities the night before by using a timetable of story of the following days events (to explain if it is school or home tomorrow). Provide structure into the weekend and holidays by using a visual timetable. Continue to lock the door and hide her bag and uniform. Allow her to wear her school uniform and pack her bag and make home more structured like school. Get a swing at home. Plan regular trip to the park to get on swing on the weekend and every day on the holidays.
<b>W</b>	Add structure the weekend and holidays to minimise the stress of the change.
<b>T</b>	Take photos of school and home to explain what days are school days and to give advance notice. Plan weekend and school days so that there is a set routine that mirrors school day (e.g. get dressed, go to park, come home, morning tea, activity etc) while still allowing flexibility. Make visual timetable to explain to Gabrielle what will happen at home on the weekend and holidays.
<b>H</b>	Talk to school in collaborative planning meeting to identify what supports school can put in place to warn Gabrielle of weekends and holidays. Have multiple copies of visuals so that photos needed for the timetable are always available. Put sign on door to remind family and visitors to lock the door.



## GROWTH MODEL

***Jack, who has an ASD, is moving on to secondary school next year. His mother wants the transition to be as smooth for Jack as possible. She thinks that moving between classes and having 6 different subjects each day will be challenging for Jack.***

<b>G</b>	Jack will learn to manage moving between classes and changing subjects several times a day.
<b>R</b>	Jack is unfamiliar with the school. Jack does not like noisy groups of people. Jack has never had to organise books and folders for different subjects before.
<b>O</b>	Jack has visits to the school to learn the layout. A colour coded map. Books and folders to be colour coded. Locker to be away from other lockers, a buddy system with a classmate. Modify Jack's class timetable to minimise daily movements.
<b>W</b>	Meeting with special education coordinator to make a transition plan.
<b>T</b>	School to provide photos and maps for Jack to familiarise him with physical layout of school. Jack to have several visits to school prior to next year. Books and folders to be streamlined and colour-coded to match timetable and map. Social story about secondary school subjects to be created. Jack to have a safe place to go if he feels anxious or needs help.
<b>H</b>	On-going communication between home and school. Review what worked and use again for next year. Modify things that didn't work. On-going access to safe place and safe person.