



How to: Support Your Child with Transitions in the Early Years

*This is part two of a three-part resource for parents on **How to: Support Your Child with Transitions in the Early Years**. This guide suggests strategies and tips for helping your Early Years child with transitions across settings and within settings, as a second step to providing effective support.*



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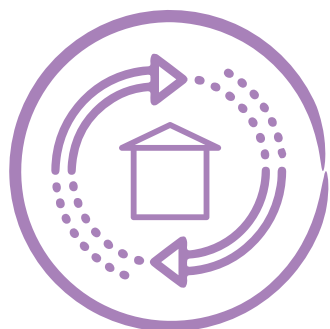


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In the **How to Series**, we provide you with our suggested strategies and top tips, to help you to effectively support your child.

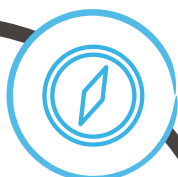
In this guide:



How to: Support Your Child With Transitions in the Early Years

This guide is **part two of three** resources on **supporting your child with transitions in the Early Years**.

The **first** resource in the series looks at the potential impact of autism on managing transitions and the **third** provides some helpful tools to make supporting your child even easier.



What is: The Potential Impact of Autism on Transitions in the Early Years (From Birth to Five)?



How to: Support Your Child with Transitions in the Early Years.



Transitions **Toolkit of Resources**.



Parent Resources



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Section 1:

An Introduction to Supporting Transitions in the Early Years.

As you may have read in **part one** of this three-part set of resources, managing transitions can be a tricky process for many parents and their children.

For an autistic child, there may also be extra factors to take into consideration, which may make transitions more challenging. This may cause some anxiety for your child and also for you, as their parent or carer.

Fortunately, there are many strategies that can be put in place to support them and you – read on to find out more and then, afterwards, why not check out **part three** of this series of resources, our **Transitions Toolkit**, for some useful tools to help make supporting your child even easier?



What are Transitions?

To recap from our **What Is Guide**, ‘transition’ means change. Transitions include: going on holiday; moving house; getting a new sibling or starting school – these are just a few examples. However, the focus of this set of resources is ‘Early Years transitions.’

‘Early Years transitions’ refer to the various changes a child experiences as they move from their preschool setting and into Primary school. This could be from a nursery to a pre-school setting, from pre-school into Primary school (in the same or different buildings) and also from a childminder or home environment into a Primary school setting.

It also refers to changes within a setting: moving rooms, changes of staff or peer group or the introduction of a uniform.

‘Early Years Transitions’ can also include what we might think of as smaller transitions, such as moving between activities, from inside to outside and vice versa and getting ready for lunch or to go home.

These transitions - small and large - can be challenging for autistic children if the right adjustments are not in place.

As mentioned in our **What is?** guide, autism may result in differences in social communication and interaction, flexibility and information processing and sensory processing and integration. These differences may then have an impact on a child’s ability to navigate transitions with ease.

This **How to Series** guide will help you to take the next step and consider some of the ways that you can effectively support your child with transitions.



Parent Resources



Section 2:



How to Help: Understanding Early Years Transitions:

To support your child effectively, it is useful to know about some of the major transitions that they will go through during their time in Early Years and school:

Mainstream Settings:

Transitions Between Settings and Phases:

Transition	Key Changes
Early Years - Nursery/ Home or Childminder to Pre-school	Transitioning from a potentially small environment with a small number of highly familiar adults and child led activity to more structure, the start of more adult led activities and a potentially larger environment with different activities.
Early Years - Pre-school to Reception (Primary school)	Transition from child led and all in one room to a more adult led day with a high level of structure and routine, more movement around a building for different parts of the day, mixing with different peers and new adults as well as new activities such as PE.
Early Years – Reception to Key Stage 1	Transitioning from play-based learning to more structured education. Introduction to basic literacy and numeracy skills in a supportive environment.



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How to Help: Understanding Early Years Transitions:

Alternative Education and Education Other Than at School:

Transition	Key Changes
Special Education Units/ Classes	Some mainstream schools offer special education units or classes that aim to support autistic children within the mainstream school environment.
Special Education Schools	Schools specifically designed for children with special educational needs, providing targeted programs and resources.
Autism-specific Schools	Schools specifically designed for autistic children providing specialised programs and trained staff.
Online Learning	Accessing virtual platforms and courses to receive education remotely, providing flexibility in terms of pace and location.
Tutoring	Hiring a tutor for one-on-one instruction, tailoring the learning experience to the child's support needs and pace.
Homeschooling	Parents take responsibility for their child's education, designing a personalised curriculum and schedule.
Forest School	Forest School emphasises learning in natural environments such as woodlands, parks, or other green spaces. This outdoor setting provides sensory-rich experiences and opportunities for exploration.



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Section 2:



How to Help: Understanding Early Years Transitions:

Choosing a Setting:

When choosing a setting, it is important to make sure that you are happy that the leadership, staff, policies, teaching and learning and environment are going to work for your autistic child. It is always a good idea to attend a school's open afternoon or evening or to ask to visit settings – it is always best to do this during school time when teaching is going on and there are children in the building.

Both of these options will usually give you the opportunity to hear from or speak to the Head Teacher/Principal or another Senior Leader, meet some staff, some children and generally get some sense of what the environment is like. Talk to them about your child's strengths, differences and support needs and listen to their responses. This will give you a “feel” for the setting. ‘Shop around’ and look into a range of options to find the setting that best suits you and your child.

Carefully consider whether or not you feel – having investigated thoroughly – that a setting is the right one for your child.



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Section 2:



How to Help: Understanding Early Years Transitions:

Understanding the Expectation of Settings During Transitions:

When it comes to making the big transitions, if your child is transitioning into a mainstream setting, there are usually at least two different types of transition that may be offered:

‘Ordinarily Available Transitions’:



This refers to the standard or typical transition process that is generally provided to all children during key educational transitions, such as moving from one phase to another or transitioning between settings. This transition process is part of the regular framework and support mechanisms that settings should offer to ensure a smooth progression for **all students**.

‘Enhanced Transitions’:



‘Enhanced Transitions’ refers to the additional expectations of settings where **a child has, or may have, SEN (Special Educational Needs), or if there is another reason they require more support** (for example they are looked after in foster care or are from a lower income household. Some children may come under more than one of these categories).

If your child is likely to attend education that is other than at school, transitions support may be enhanced as standard. It is important to check this when you are researching which type of setting is the most suited to your child.



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How to Help: Understanding Early Years Transitions:

Ordinarily Available Transitions:

Communication:



- Schools are expected to maintain clear and effective communication with parents and children about upcoming transitions.
- It is important that they share information regarding changes in learning, setting structure, routines and support.

Transition Programmes:



- Settings are encouraged to put in place structured transition programmes, especially during key transitions such as starting primary school.
- These programs often include: visits, tours, and activities to familiarise children with the new environment and help staff get to know them and what they need in place for starting school.

Work With Parents:



- Settings are expected to actively involve parents in the transition process.
- Parental engagement may include: information sessions; meetings; workshops; sharing information about your child and opportunities to discuss questions or concerns.



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How to Help: Understanding Early Years Transitions:

The Emotional Wellbeing of Children:



- Addressing the emotional well-being of children should be a priority during transitions.
- Settings are expected to have mechanisms in place to identify and support children who may become anxious. This may be through a Situation Story* about the new setting or a photo book of key people and places that parents can familiarise them with at home during the summer holiday before starting school.

** Situation Stories is the term preferred by our Autistic Young Experts. The term builds on Carol Gray's Social Story™ concept.*

Continuity of Learning:



- Ensuring continuity in learning is vital, especially during transitions between phases. It is important that the new setting knows the child's starting point and understands their unique learning profile.
- Settings are expected to work together to facilitate a smooth progression in learning content and skills.

Professional Development for Staff:



- It is good practice for setting staff to undergo training on the effective management of transitions as well as training on good autism practice, like the kind we offer at the **Autism Education Trust**.
- This training helps staff understand the needs of autistic children during transitions and how they can best support them.



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How to Help: Understanding Early Years Transitions:

Enhanced Transitions:

Transition Planning:



Settings are required, by law, to initiate early planning for the transition of a child who has or who may have SEN.



- Planning for enhanced transitions should begin well in advance and must involve parents or carers, the child, and any other relevant professionals.

Individualised Transition Plan:



- For children on SEN support plans or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), settings **must** create an individualised transition plan.
- This plan should address the **specific support needs and requirements** of the child during the transition period and beyond.
- Some settings will also create individualised transition plans for children with SEN who do not have an EHCP, because it is good practice.

Consideration of Learning, Social, and Emotional Aspects:



- Transition Plans should cover: learning; social; and emotional aspects of your child's development.
- Settings should provide transition support beyond just supporting your child in learning– transitions plans should address any potential challenges in social inclusion and emotional well-being which may then cause barriers to learning.



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How to Help: Understanding Early Years Transitions:

Notification to Parents:



- Parents must be informed about their child options in terms of which types of educational provision are available to them and they should be part of the decision-making process.
- Settings must actively involve parents or carers, seeking their input and ensuring their concerns and aspirations for their child are a key consideration.



You can refer to our **Transitions Checklist** in our **Transitions Toolkit for further assistance with the transitions process. Use the checklist as a guide to help you to follow up with settings if you think things are not being done or put in place when they should be.**

Collaboration with Receiving Setting:



- The current setting, be that nursery, preschool or childminder must collaborate with the receiving setting, to facilitate a smooth transition.
- Information about your child's additional support needs and preferred communication and support strategies should also be shared to ensure continuity of support and provision.



It is the law that schools should be including the views and preferences of the child and their parents or carers as part of this process.



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How to Help: Understanding Early Years Transitions:

Support during Transition:



- Settings are obliged to provide the necessary support during an actual transition, ensuring that new environments are accessible and adapted as far as possible to suit the needs of your child.

Reviews:



- Regular reviews of the transition plan should take place, so that adjustments can be made as needed throughout the process, to accommodate any changes in your child's support needs or circumstances.

Maintaining Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs):



- For children with an EHCP, the local authority must maintain the plan until the transition is complete, and the new provision is in place.

Monitoring and Reporting:



- Settings are responsible for monitoring your child's progress and should be especially mindful of monitoring this after a key transition. They must report back to you on a regular basis.



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Section 3:



How to Help: Know Your Child:

There will be certain aspects of transitions that most autistic children will find challenging. For instance, the changing environment, adults and children, routines and expectations.

However, the extent to which these things impact on your child will be unique to them. All autistic children are individuals and all have their own strengths, differences and support needs within the three areas of difference in autism.

As such, the best way to help your child is to think in detail about where their strengths lie, what areas they may require more support with and which key interests might act as motivators.

You might find it useful to think about these things in advance of any review or transition planning meeting.



There is a **One Page Profile** template and a **What is a Communication Passport: Factsheet** in our **Transitions Toolkit**. You can use both of these tools to gather together important information about your child, to share with a setting.



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Section 4:



How to Help: Work with the Setting:

- Attend open sessions, tours and information meetings, coffee mornings or visits related to transitions and getting to know staff.
- Attend review meetings and transition planning meetings.
- Make sure you prepare for reviews and transitions planning meetings: provide helpful information that will enable settings to support your child effectively with transitions.
- Make sure the review and planning meeting is minuted and that you are given copies of the minutes and plans afterwards. This means you can check that they include everything you discussed in the meeting.
- Make sure you know what should be happening when and who is responsible, so you can follow up on this if necessary.
- Keep the setting updated of any changes that could impact your child's support needs.
- Make sure you know the key contact details for staff in your child's new setting - For example: The Head Teacher, the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), Key Person, Phase or Year Group Lead, Class Teacher (s).
- Use the school webpage / app / news bulletin / letters to keep track of updates regarding key dates, key events and key information regarding:

- Term dates



- Daily routines



- Uniform



- Lunches



- Equipment



- Share achievements or events that happen at home, with your child's setting via the settings online learning journal so that your child's teachers can celebrate and visit this with them.



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Section 5:



Strategies to Support Your Child to Manage Transitions:

It is really helpful if you can pinpoint exactly what your child's strengths and support needs are in relation to transitions. This will help you to identify where you can praise to boost their confidence as well as areas where they need support from you, the setting, or more likely - both.



There is a ***Practical Strategies for Transitions*** short guide in our ***Transitions Toolkit***, which you can use to help you support your child with some common transition scenarios.



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Section 6:



Top Tips:

If you just want a quick overview of some of our most popular strategies for supporting transitions, then read on to discover our Top Tips...

It is important to remember, however, that these are **general** suggestions and you should choose the tips that you feel will be most helpful, based on your knowledge of your child.

Top Transitions Tips:

Help your Child to Prepare for the big Changes:

Participate in Transition Events Whenever Possible:

1

- Try to attend as many transitions events as possible so that you know what to expect – this means that you will be able to explain to your child what to expect also and reassure them when they have questions.
- Encourage your child to participate in transition events too, perhaps taking photos of things that are important to them.
- If getting to events is difficult or you know that your child will need support to access these events, then speak to the setting. Most settings will be glad to help if it means you and your child are able to join in.

Work with your Child on any Transition Projects – and try to make it fun!

2

- Lots of settings ask children to complete 'All About Me' booklets, 'Summer Challenges' or 'My New School' activities.
- A lot of thought has usually gone into these and it will be useful to help your child to complete them if you can. Often, they have pictures of the new school, pictures of uniform, pictures of key staff and information about key routines. If they are reluctant, leave them around the home and model looking at them so they become familiar to your child.
- These types of activities help children to feel prepared, which is very important for those who are autistic. Making things as predictable as possible will help to reduce anxiety and make big transitions easier.



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Section 6:

Top Tips:

Practise Ahead of Time:

3

- Getting up at a particular time.
- Trying on the uniform.
- Practising the “getting ready for school” routine.
- Doing the journey to the setting.

Use Visual Strategies:

4

- A **visual timetable** is simply a series of squares containing pictures of key events across a day, a process, an activity or an event. Autistic children often find it more difficult to process lots of verbal or written information and find visuals easier to manage.
- You could ask the setting for a **visual timetable** to be displayed on the wall of a classroom for an Early Years child and for a copy for home to refer to.
- It may be useful to ask staff for information on when key lessons happen in the week, such as PE so that you can discuss this with your child at home and they can be prepared.
- You can use **visual timetables** to help with transitions at home too – for example the sequence from getting up, to getting dressed, to having breakfast or the stages of your child’s journey to school.
- Some children may not be able to process the whole routine before going into the setting and may need a ‘Now and Next’ or ‘First and Then’ board.



Check out our **Visual Strategies for Transition: Factsheet**, in our **Transitions Toolkit**, for more information about visual strategies and how you can use them to support your child.



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Section 6:

Top Tips:

Help your Child with the Transition from Home into the Setting:

Think about the Practicalities:

5

- Many autistic children need support with activities requiring fine motor skills. Therefore, it is a good idea to consider purchasing clothing for school that is adapted - if your child has difficulties with buttons or laces for instance.
- Lots of shops now make uniform that is adaptable. Tag-less clothes, seamless socks, clip on ties.
- Speak to your child's school about reasonable adjustments for clothing if you are told that uniform must be purchased from a single supplier who cannot provide adaptable clothing. Reasonable adjustments could also include wearing T-shirt or trousers that are school colours but elasticated waist or coming into school in PE kit on PE days, for example.

Support them with Organisation:

6

- Try using **storage boxes** which are clearly marked with pictures and words to help children to keep their school shoes, bag etc together in one place and to encourage independence.
- **Use checklists:** these could be used to support your child with getting ready before school or with packing their bag. You could put a checklist by the door to support them to check they have everything they need for the school day eg reading book, lunchbox, water bottle, PE kit.



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Section 6:

Top Tips:

Support them with the Transition Between Setting and Home:

Support with Regulation and Decompressing:

- Understand that when your child returns home from setting, they may need time to relax. Some may need to sleep or simply to “zone out”. This may be because of the extra effort required for autistic children to manage in a setting.
- You could provide sensory boxes / objects / fidget toys to support your child with regulation and decompressing.
- Some children like to be able to lie in a dark, quiet bedroom when they return home to help them to regulate after they have had to deal with lots of sensory input over the course of the day.
- Some younger children may even like to lie in a dark tent.
- Minimise your communication and questions at these times to allow your child to decompress. They will likely share their day with you when they have processed it.

7

Homework/ Home learning:

- Help your child to see home learning as a skill for life. Make it part of a routine. Keep it short, fun and motivating.
- Bear in mind that what the teacher views as a short task may be experienced as a long task by your child and therefore some tasks might have to be broken down into very small steps/tasks and presented bit-by-bit to them or over a longer period of time.
- This will also give your child a sense of accomplishment when they complete the shorter tasks which will help to motivate them.
- You can also help your child by providing them with short, clear instructions for tasks. Ask teachers to help you with this – perhaps sharing an example of one of the tasks so your child can recall the learning they did in class. Visual supports may make work more accessible.
- Remember that due to differences in flexibility and information processing, your child may be able to easily do things in one environment that they cannot yet do in another and this will need time, learning and practice.

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Section 7:

Top Five Take Aways:

There is a lot to think about here, so below are our *Top Five Take Aways*:

1

Collaborate with the setting on your child's transition - you are your child's first teacher and sharing what you know is really important.

2

Prepare and practice - the uniform, the journey to school, carrying their own bag and so on.

3

Use visuals to support understanding of routines, tasks, where to put things and independence.

4

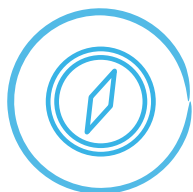
Give your child time at the end of the day - you will be excited to see them and wanting to hear all about their day but they will likely need to decompress first. Give them time and space and they will share with you when they are ready.

5

Keep sharing with the key adults in the setting. If something changes or something is not working, it is important to discuss it and find a way forward before there are further issues.



Now, Why Not Take the Next Steps?



If you haven't done so already, check out our guide on **What is: The Potential Impact of Autism on Transitions in the Early Years?**



Check out our ***Transitions Toolkit*** of resources, to help you put support in place more easily.



Parent Resources



References:

We have referred to them as Situation Stories, however, the concept is the work of Carol Gray on Social Stories. A link to her work and website is provided here:

Gray, C, (2015) ***The New Social Story Book: Over 150 Social Stories That Teach Everyday Social Skills to Children and Adults with Autism and Their Peers*** (Future Horizons.
Website: <https://carolgraysocialstories.com>)

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