

Autism Parent Workshop: Social support and transition

A very warm welcome to you all



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Aims of today's workshop

- To explore social skills for children with autism
- To consider support for transition to a new year group or to secondary school



What is autism?

The idea that there is one "normal" type of brain or mind or one "right" style of functioning, is no more valid than the idea that there is one "normal" or "right" gender, race or culture.

ASD is a condition that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people; how they are affected by their environment and how they experience the world around them.

Supporting Your children in Social Situations

On the following slides, there are some examples of difficulties that children may experience, with some ideas on how they could make things less stressful for themselves in school and in everyday life.



Does your child sometimes find it difficult being part of a group?

For people with ASD, being in a group of people can be really difficult.

Some people with ASD say having to work in a group to discuss something or do a task is their worst nightmare! They say this is because they have to be 'sociable' and think about something else at the same time and that's just too much.

So ...what could they do?

Help your child to take control ...advise them:

- If there are people who you feel more comfortable with than others, tell the teacher (privately) and ask to be put in small groups with them when possible. (It probably won't be possible all the time - but sometimes is better than never).
- Ask the teacher to allow you to leave the group if you feel you need to and sit somewhere else in the room for a while.
- If there are students you feel comfortable with, let them know that group work is a real problem for you; that might make it easier for you to leave the group if you need to.

Do you sometimes find conversations difficult?

Some people with ASD have problems talking to others. Some of the issues that people experience are on the following slides.



What do I
say to
people at
playtime?!

Problems with conversations:

Some or all of these might fit with someone who has ASD:

- Struggles to start conversations about general topics.
- Only feels comfortable talking about the subjects they know a lot about.
- Has difficulty understanding what someone really means - are they being mean or kind?
- Struggles with certain figures of speech that aren't clear.
- Sometimes interrupts conversations without noticing.
- Doesn't actively show interest in the things other people say.
- Has trouble taking turns in conversations.
- Asks lots and lots of questions.
- Suddenly changes topic in conversations or ends them suddenly.

Again, help your child to feel in control and advise:

- If you have problems starting conversations, ask someone you trust (maybe a family member or learning mentor) to help you practise what you could say in different situations e.g. break time at school / college. Many people with ASD manage to teach themselves simple conversation starters. You would have to be careful that these don't become too repetitive but once you start, you may begin to feel a bit less awkward as you will have something to work from which might help you to relax a little.

Another tip is to arrive in rooms / groups first so that you feel more in control.

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○If you often interrupt people's conversations it might be helpful to study video of conversations. You could ask a professional (a learning mentor / CAMHS worker) to help you work out what the cues are, for you to take your turn to speak.

The meaning of words.

Some people with ASD have problems with the meaning of words in conversation. It is often to do with taking things that are said to them literally.

They might for example have difficulty understanding:

- Figures of speech (idioms). E.g.: 'It's an uphill battle'. This is making a comment about something being very difficult to do (not about a fight on a mountain) but someone with ASD might misunderstand that.
- Humour / jokes / sarcasm. Someone with ASD might feel left out as they 'don't get it' when everyone else seems to.

Teasing. Someone with ASD might be very upset by a small comment which was only meant as a friendly remark

○ Some people who have problems with 'figures of speech' learn commonly used ones and their meanings. You could Google 'Idioms' and work your way through the alphabetical list. Some people find it helpful to use pictures / drawings for this - one for the literal meaning and one for what is really meant - as it helps to make it stick in their mind.



- If another child is being unkind to your child, we advise your child to:
 - Take a minute to think about what happened just before it was said. If everything was going smoothly, it's unlikely they would suddenly start being mean.
 - You might find it helpful to do some work on tone of voice. The way people say things can be closer to the real meaning than the words themselves. Try watching and replaying scenes from films and TV. Think about the tone of voice people have when they are being friendly and when they are being mean.
 - Facial expressions are part of our communication with each other. People with ASD sometimes find it hard to work out what they mean. It might help look at TV clips with people showing different emotions and discuss them with someone you trust. WE also use social stories to support with this.

Unstructured times of day- free time

Does your child find unstructured times at school or even at home difficult?

- Many young people who have ASD struggle during break and lunch time at school. They say they find these times difficult as they have to manage the time themselves without any focus. They often say they find it hard as they don't like having to chat and aren't sure about how to fill the time. This can make them feel sad or anxious.
- Some young people who have ASD find their time after school, the weekends and holidays difficult as there isn't a set structure for their time and things change a lot. This can make them feel sad, frustrated or angry

We would advise:

At school, try talking to a member of staff you feel comfortable with about lunch / break being difficult. There might be a particular place you can go to for people who feel like this.

Alternatively, try the library / computer room or clubs such as chess or textiles so that you have a focus. (Don't just stay in the toilets - even if that feels like the easiest option - as this isn't a good long term strategy).

○If you find free time at home difficult, talk to the people you live with. Explain what you find hard. (For example things suddenly being arranged, plans changing all the time, people being late etc.).

Explain the effect these things have on you - perhaps making you sad / frustrated/ anxious / angry or maybe even giving you physical symptoms such as a heavy feeling in your chest or stomach ache.

Real life is often mixed up and disorganised so they won't always be able to do what you would like but at least it will help them to understand how you feel.

○It might help to do a timetable, with someone at home, setting out the week ahead for evenings, weekends and holidays so that you know what is coming up. Again, there will probably be changes but having structure some of the time is better than nothing.



Transition

Some children and adults are highly sensitive to transitions. However, unlike adults who have the power to control transitions, children often do not have that same control. On top of that, children are not always able to tell us how they are feeling or what they need when they are feeling dysregulated during transitions.

Think about how we plan and organize our daily life to avoid the stress of transitions. We have so many tools we use such as, using our visual schedules, trying not to rush or be late, reducing the number of transitions, being consistent in our routines, providing ourselves with redirection during more stressful transitions. We even carry transition objects [almost everyone carries a smartphone these days], and sometimes we dangle a carrot [ever stopped for a coffee as a treat?] to help with those less preferred transitions.

Transitions and the Sensitive Child

Many children with autism are sensitive to transitions. There are so many factors that may make transitions difficult for them such as; Has the child slept well? Have they eaten? Are they sick or getting sick? Have they had a stressful day at school?

And then there is the emotional factor. If past transitions have been difficult for the child, then the child anticipates that every transition will be the same. This negative emotional memory adds stress to the transition. As the transition approaches, the child becomes more and more anxious and challenging behaviours may begin to escalate.

Eight Strategies to Support Positive Transitions for Children with Autism

1. Provide a visual schedule – include a daily visual schedule as part of your child's daily routine to help prepare them for transitions before they occur. Visual schedules provide your child with a plan for the day.

Jeremy



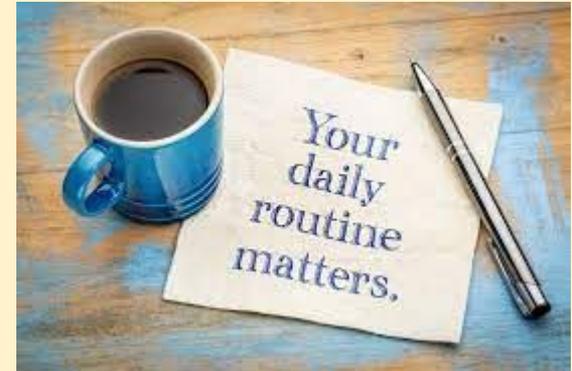
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W	maths	science	lunch	staff	staff	birthday	home	
Th	maths	tra	lunch	art	art	break	music	home
F	history	accounting	lunch	reading	cooking	break	assembly	home



2. Reduce the number of transitions – plan your child’s day to reduce the number of transitions as much as possible.

3. Consistency and Predictability – follow the same routine, patterns, driving routes, etc. The consistency and predictability will lessen the stress during the transitions.

4. Slow Down – do not rush your child, give them transition warnings using verbal and visual supports and then lots of time to process and come to the transition when they are ready.



5. Offer a Break – build in short breaks throughout the child’s day to support their regulatory needs [movement, water, deep pressure]. Addressing their sensory and emotional needs will lessen stress during transitions.



6. Use redirection – use the child’s affinity to engage them just before a transition. This offers redirection away from the anxiety and stress of the transition focusing instead on something enjoyable.



7. Provide a Transition Object – carrying a transition object can lessen stress during the transition. Encourage your child to choose something to bring from home and something they carry with them throughout the day.



8. Dangle a Carrot – offer your child rewards following an activity to help with the transition.

Offering your child, a preferred toy or treat redirects their focus during the stress of a transition. It also helps create positive emotional memories around transitions





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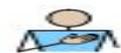
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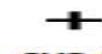


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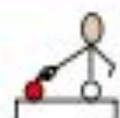
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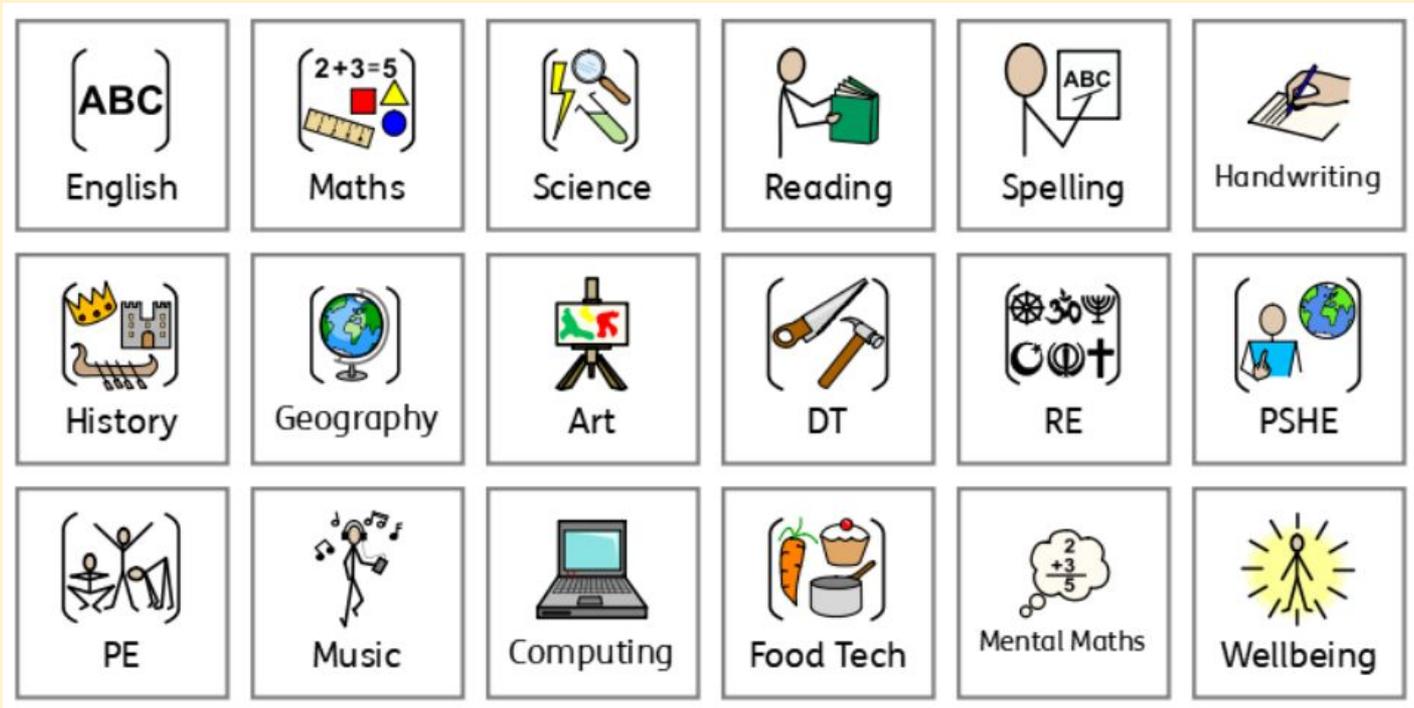


These are some of the lessons that I will



have at school.

Visuals for school subjects:



Who can I talk to?

   a  bit  nervous  about

 coming back  to school  and  that  is  ok.  I can

 talk to  my  adults  and  they  will  try to

 answer  any  questions  that  I  have.  They

 might  not  have  all of  the answers

 straight away.  I  might  be  excited  about

 coming back  to school  and  that  is  also  ok!

Secondary School transition:

- I work closely with the SENCOs at the secondary schools that our year 6 children are going to and provide all paperwork for the child accordingly and we will meet to talk through needs
- The senco or SEN team member will usually visit our school to meet children with SEN to help them feel at ease
- I check all transition paperwork that is completed by the class teachers to ensure that the correct SEN information is accounted for

Things for you to consider if your child is transitioning to Year 7:

- Journey to and from school: road safety, what to do if there is a diversion, keeping safe
- Uniform: make this as exciting as possible, ask your child to try this on well in advance of starting in September. This will help them have a sense of belonging to their new school
- Once they have started, support your child in understanding their weekly timetable. Have this up somewhere in the home to refer to and check through together
- Establish a consistent morning routine and support with time management
- Keep lines of communication open with your child and with the new school, if you have any concerns, don't be afraid to contact the school as soon as possible

Low mood

Children may struggle to understand what is happening at this time, as a result, there may be a range of negative feelings present.

Things you can do

Promoting a positive mindset - creating a can do attitude - finding tasks that highlight improvements or become easier in time

Positive Diary - this is something to complete everyday. The Positive Diary has been designed to help the individual reflect and focus upon times where they have felt proud, achieved something or made someone else feel good. Using this consistently may help the individual recognise that great things happen everyday.

M O N	Something I did well today...	
	Today I had fun when...	
	I felt proud when...	
T U E	Today I accomplished	
	I had a positive experience with...	
	Something I did for someone...	

Transition continued:

- Children who find transitioning to a new class challenging will receive a transition book to take home for the summer holiday.
This will contain:
 - photos of their new teacher and LSA
 - photos of the new classroom and other key areas of the school they will be using
 - a countdown calendar to help them to understand how many weeks or days are left until school begins again in September
 - key things to remember such as what to bring to school each day

The teachers will have a through handover meeting and so all details for your child will be passed on clearly to ensure a consistent approach in continuing to care and support your child at Grange Park.

If a child has an EHCP or LSP, I ensure that all key objectives are communicated clearly to the next teacher and LSA in a meeting in July.

Mental wellbeing support

Our leads at Grange Park

Mental Health Lead: Karen Ayres **Learning Coach:** Colin Williams

Mental health Support Team: Karen Ayres, Colin Williams

Safeguarding Team: Tijen Hassan, Rebecca Neale, Sue Denny, Karen Ayres, Tracy Murray

Outside support

Anna Freud Centre: <https://www.annafreud.org/>

- Great support and information for parents and carers

Parent Support Service: <https://new.enfield.gov.uk/if/parent-support-service/>

- Enfield service offers 1:1 support to parents who are struggling with issues with their children at home up to the age of 18

Educational Psychologist Support (EPS) TELEPHONE: 0208 379 2000

- This service provides free support via a telephone consultation