BeyondAutism
Outreach and Training

Starting school resource pack

A guide for teachers and parents

Introduction

Starting the school year can be a difficult time for all pupils, especially those with autism and special educational needs.

This resource pack has been created to provide help for schools and families when planning for the new school year.

- There are some transitions that are trickier than others, for example the transition from nursery to reception, from primary school to secondary school or mid-way through the term.
- For some autistic children, even the start of a school year that isn't a major transition will still present many challenges.
- Autistic children typically struggle with changes to routines, unpredictable situations, social interactions with new people and communicating their thoughts and feelings.
- Below you will find top tips when planning the new school year for teachers and for parents, some specific details on how to create a person-centred plan (PCP) and finally some downloadable resources to help with the new school year.
- When planning for the school year, if you are a teacher or a parent, the key factors that need to be considered are:
  - It is vital to 'do' and not just 'say' when supporting children with autism and SEN. e.g. show them how and where to line up for lunch, don't just tell them and hope that they do it.
  - Start the transition as early as possible in the summer term (schools) / towards the end of the summer holidays (parents).

At the end of this document there are a selection of visual supports as well as person-centred planning resources that you can download, print off and use to support your child with their transition back to school and beyond!

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For teaching staff

1 Start the preparation for transition as early as possible with your pupil
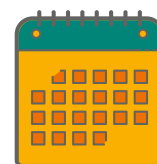
- If an autistic child is in your class already, plan to prepare them for the next school year in the summer term.
- If an autistic child is joining your class, find out if they are being prepared in their current class and offer support when you have prepared your class (see next step).

2 Plan the classroom environment to be inclusive (make reasonable adjustments)

- Break areas - a quiet place in the classroom or out of the class.
- Work station - if needed, but not isolated completely. Can fade the use of the workstation out over time.
- Additional resources (see resources section).

3 Plan the daily / weekly schedule to be inclusive (make reasonable adjustments)

- Does the autistic child need additional break times in their timetable?
- Where will extra sessions such as speech therapy fit in?
- Identify in the timetable a space for working on social skills for the young person and their peers, including typically developing peers.

4 What preparation will the rest of the class need? Extra carpet sessions / assemblies to share information about autism for example.

5 Communicating the young person's needs across the school – how will this be done to support lunch time supervisors for example.

6 Understanding of basic behavioural principles can help to support an autistic child

- Pairing – spend time getting to know the child and what they enjoy doing, join in with play and pair yourself and the environment with fun activities, even if there is a 1:1 TA.
- Motivation – when someone is motivated they will engage in behaviour to access what they want. By understanding this you can support your pupil to be successful, e.g. helping them to request a break when they find work too hard.
- Reinforcement – everyone is different, and what is a reinforcer for one child to work may not be the same for another. Understanding this can help you utilise the individuals reinforcers to increase their on task behaviour.

7 Seek additional support:

- The school SENCo/Inclusion Manager
- Council local offer
- BeyondAutism Outreach Service

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For parents

1 Start the preparation for transition as early as possible with your daughter or son (in June or July)

- Ask your school to tell you what class they will go into and what teacher they will have next year.
- Ask for pictures of the classroom/staff to help prepare your daughter or son over the holidays.
- The school may even have a video tour on their website or would allow you to film the transition into school to use for preparing for the changes.

2 Creating an extended planner that covers the summer and into the start of the new school term could help your daughter or son to understand when school is coming back

- You know your child best, if seeing the plan too early would make them more anxious about the change you can delay the preparation.

3 Talk to them about the new school year and use the visuals to help make things more concrete

- You can still talk to your daughter or son about the changes even if they are unable to have a conversation about it themselves.
- Frequent exposure to pictures of the classroom and staff or even watching a video of the new environment will help prepare your child.

4 Share with the new class teacher what things you and your family did over the summer holidays

- What trips did you go on?
- What skills has your daughter or son been working on?
- Have any skills or behaviour regressed over the holidays?
- What did your daughter or son enjoy doing over the holidays?

5 If you need support or have concerns, you could seek help from:

- The school SENCo/Inclusion Manager
- Council local offer
- BeyondAutism Outreach Service

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Person-centred plans

How should we plan when supporting autistic individuals?

When planning support of any kind, person-centred planning provides a way of supporting a person to plan any aspect of their life. It ensures that the individual remains at the centre of all planning that affects them. Person-centred planning is not an assessment – instead it is a way of involving a person in planning for the future and making changes in a person's life.

Person-centred plans (PCPs) should always respect the ways people communicate. People who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) should be supported to use their preferred method of communicating.

The person at the centre of the planning should always feel in control over the plans that are made, including who is involved and how they are documented. They should be able to express personal preferences and anxieties when going through change. PCPs should be reviewed regularly and as changes happen in someone's life, such as school transitions.

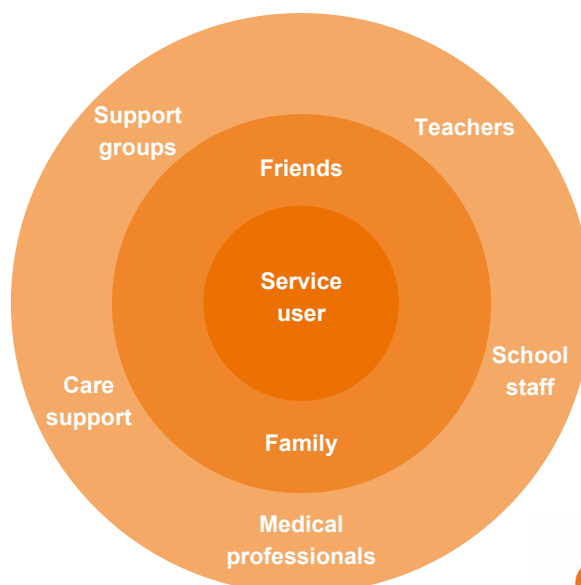| Important to	Individual	Important for

Understanding the difference between 'Important to' and 'Important for':

- 'Important to' are the things that a person cares about or loves. For example, it might be their family, friends, a television programme or activity.
- 'Important for' are the things a person needs in order to live their life. This might include the type of support or how things are done.

Circles of support

The 'circles of support' for an individual are important when planning how support might be delivered and by who. They should work outwards, with the inner circles relating to close family and friends, and outer circles may be school staff or teachers.

Not everyone has the same people in each circle, so getting the views of the individual is important, and being specific about, for example, which relatives. Some people might feel more connected to their friends, rather than traditional relatives. A support circle also prompts discussions around what support might not currently be available, and where additional resources need to be found.

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Person-centred plans

SMART targets for transition

Goal setting is important because it ensures that the autistic individual is not missing out on the support that they need. Identifying goals throughout the year rather than through standard formal exams, for example at the end of a school year, means that progress can be closely monitored and adapted accordingly. When setting targets, for example around transition to a new school year, they should be SMART.

S Specific - clearly defined, not vague

M Measurable - how will success be evidenced?

A Attainable - is the target realistic for the individual?

R Relevant - does it fit the individual's skill set, should they be learning the skill?

T Time bound - when will the skill be learnt by?

For example: The pupil will meet the new teacher and explore the new classroom twice a week for the last 4 weeks of the summer term. They will also complete a worksheet concerning the new details about the new class such as teacher name, where to hang their coat and where they will sit etc.

Behaviour support plans

Behaviour support plans should be part of an overall care plan. Proactive measures can prevent situations occurring, by allowing space to calm down or facilitating communication.

It is important to understand that carers and families can change their behaviour and adapt the environment to support autistic individuals and reduce behaviour that is perceived to challenge. They may also be inadvertently reinforcing behaviours that challenge themselves.

A person-centred plan will help to ensure that autistic individualsare front and centre of the planning and support. The team around that individual will highlight triggers and anxieties and come up with a range of strategies to support them through the situations that they find hard.

Person-centred plans

The Zones of Regulation (Leah Kuypers - www.zonesofregulation.com)

The Zones of Regulation is a programme designed to support students to better understand and describe emotions, with a view to them being able to identify them in themselves and better regulate them.

It categorises all emotions into 4 key zones. This list is not exhaustive! All emotions can be categorised into one of the zones.

The Green Zone = ok, calm, happy, relaxed, chilled out, focused, ready to learn.

The Blue Zone = low regulation - sad, tired, slow, lethargic, feeling poorly or unwell, sleepy.

The Yellow Zone = heightened emotions – anxious, worried, excited, wiggly, silly, annoyed, giggly.

The Red Zone = any emotion to an extreme where it cannot be controlled – depression, panic/ terror, absolute elation, hysteria, anger and so on.

How is it used?

Zones can be differentiated based on the need of the learner. At the most basic level, usually one feeling is attributed to each zone (e.g. green = happy, blue = sad, yellow = worried/excited and red = angry). Visuals can be used to label emotions in others, and postulate how students might be feeling ("you look like you might be a bit worried, I can see you moving slowly and looking down. [show visual] shall we try some activities?").

For more advanced students, zones can be used to identify how they are feeling and then use their toolboxes (lists of activities) to help them function in that zone e.g. a yellow zone toolbox has calming activities and a blue zone toolbox has alerting activities.