



# Tips for Entry to Junior Grades

## Tips for Successful Entry to Junior Grades

Individuals who have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often have difficulties with taking in information in new situations, dealing with changes in their routine, determining what is expected in a situation and then responding appropriately. The goals for the following strategies are to assist children to cope with the changes that occur when entering a new grade and the new expectations and challenges that they will face.

## Recommendations for Parents and School Personnel

- Start planning for September in the early spring. Ensure information on the strengths and needs of your child is given to the school prior to their arrival. Generally a transfer case conference will be arranged where information from professionals currently involved with your child (e.g. Occupational Therapist, Previous Teachers, Preschool Autism Services) will be able to provide information regarding your child. Also, other professionals from the Board and Community Agencies (e.g. Special Education Resource Teacher, Special Education Consultant and Community Care Access Centre) will be available to discuss the resources that they are able to offer. It is helpful to know what strategies have been effective and also not effective as “old behaviours” may reappear during stressful times.
- Visit the school with your child a few days before school starts. This is an excellent time to give the school an update of your child’s accomplishments or changes that have occurred over the summer. It is important for your child to become acquainted with the school and include important parts of the building e.g. where to enter and exit the building, toilets, library, playground, etc. Determine the shortest way to the bathrooms and make sure that your child is familiar with the route.
- Find out the place where your child can hang up their knapsack and coat when they are entering the classroom. If your child will have a locker, locate a lock that is easy for your child to open/close.
- Discuss with the school what will be involved in the home school communication: Is there a home school communication book, or will the teacher call home and when/where is the best time to call.
- Determine if there are any restrictions on what your child can bring for snacks or lunches. This may be more of a concern for children with limited diets.
- Discuss with the school professional where a “safe location” can be located should your child need a break. Also discuss how your child can request a break without resorting to inappropriate behaviour.
- Use a social narrative (if appropriate) that incorporates elements of the transition to school. Use lots of visuals and diagrams to illustrate it. Video taping the school and teachers is another alternative for children who may prefer watching a video to a story. Collect pictures of the Teachers, Educational Assistants, and Bus Drivers and remember to obtain the pictures from the eye level or perspective of the child.

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- Ask if there are “practice runs” with the bus company so that your child has an opportunity to step on the bus, sit down and drive around in it. If there are concerns regarding bus safety, as your child may not remain sitting, discuss the use of an adapted seat belt or harness to ensure his/her safety. If the actual ride is going to be a long one, determine which activities are acceptable to keep your child occupied e.g. a hand held video game, listening to music, etc. Your child can be taught to give these activities to the bus driver who can then give it to the teaching staff or caregiver at either end of the journey. A seat near the front might be a good idea as the bus driver can easily see or hear your child. Providing your child with a social story about riding the bus may be helpful as well as visual supports of what is acceptable behaviour on the bus.
- Discuss with the school professional the possibility of an information letter that could be sent home to other families so they can discuss with their children what Autism is and how they can be supportive of their child’s questions. Also, consider the possibility for the teacher to discuss Autism in the classroom.
- Start a calendar countdown: Use a calendar and mark the date the school starts. If your child responds well to visuals, mark the start date with a picture /symbol of the school or of a school bus. Cross each day off on the calendar together with your child.
- Purchase supplies that will be needed ahead of time.
- Purchase a backpack that has many compartments so it can easily be organized, e.g. a pen goes in the front pocket.
- Start the school well rested. If your child’s vacation sleep schedule is not conducive to starting early, shift to a school friendly schedule.
- Sensory red flags: wash the new clothes, and air out backpacks, snack bags etc. so that everything does not smell, look and feel different the first day of school.
- If your child is transitioning from another class, ask for extra copies of visuals that have been used so that your child will be familiar with the schedule and materials at start.

### References

Hodgkins., L. (). Adapted from 10 *Things you can do Now and Over the Summer*. Massachusetts: General Hospital.