



February 2021

It's Transition Planning Time!

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The holidays are wrapped up and a New Year has started. The school year is already half complete. If you haven't already started planning for transitions of students to new teachers and/or environments, start NOW! Successful transitioning of students on the autism spectrum requires an incredible amount of planning and collaboration. So what are the steps?

- 1.** Write up a two-page report on the student. Page one should include a brief biography, highlighting the strengths of the student and the advancements the student has made since entering your program. Page two should be in bullet format and include a list of reinforcers, as well as the rate of reinforcement needed to maintain successful programming. Page two should also address areas of special interest and the degree to which incorporating that interest into assignments is beneficial.
- 2.** Bring the team together at the completion of the first quarter. Introduce the parents to the receiving staff (including administrators). Share with each of those present your synopsis of the student. Have available samples of assignments, daily data sheets and a copy of the students IEP

and behavior intervention plan. Share the method by which open, ongoing communication has been established with the parents. Specifically address the information that is shared and the time frame in which it is shared. After you have a chance to share the information you have, ask for information about the new setting:

- a.** How will the environment be different?
 - b.** Is the building larger, multi-floored?
 - c.** Is the cafeteria set up the same?
 - d.** How much experience and training does the receiving staff have?
- 3.** Establish a schedule for visits:
 - a.** Make a trip (without the student) to the receiving school. Take note of how this environment is both different and similar to what the student knows.
 - b.** Invite the receiving school to observe the student in your setting. Arrange the time so that the receiving staff has the opportunity to see the student in a variety of settings. Arrange multiple visits.
 - c.** Provide the receiving staff with the opportunity to work with the student in your environment.
 - d.** Prepare the student by writing Social

Stories™ about the upcoming change. Include actual photos of the building, staff and other students in the story.

e. Complete a “drive-by staring” of the building with the student.

f. Set up a schedule of visits for the student. Take a familiar/preferred activity for the student to complete while they are there. Start with very short visits and build to longer ones, culminating in spending entire school days in the new environment.

4. Meet throughout the transition period with the staff from both schools. Review successes in the process and barriers to success.

Understand that transition doesn't just affect the student; in reality, it is a transition for everyone—staff, student and the student's family. Remember, most students on the spectrum have some difficulties in the area of communication; as a result, the parent frequently must rely on the school staff to communicate with them regarding their child's academic, social and behavioral progress. The single biggest predictor of student success is the teacher's ability to develop a relationship with first the student and second the family.

TIPS FROM THE CORNER: Think of a school year like a long story. It has a beginning, middle, and end. We have completed the beginning of the story and have already plunged into the middle of our year's long story. The beginning of the story was full of new things for students to explore; perhaps a new room, teacher, classmates, and coursework, and let's face it, the first semester is chock full of events and holidays that provide a ridiculous amount of time out of school. Now begins the arduous middle of the story. Not too much that's really new and school breaks that are fewer and further apart making for a long winter for some students

Why do we need to do this?

Individuals with ASD may:

- have difficulties with changes in routine or in environments
- have a need for "sameness" and predictability
- have difficulty understanding verbal directives or explanations, including multi-step directions (executive functioning deficits)
- not recognize subtle cues leading up to a transition
- have restrictive patterns of behavior that are difficult to disrupt
- have greater anxiety levels during times of unpredictability

and teachers.

Teachers that thrive during this time use several tricks to keep students motivated and interested in what lies ahead. Keep units small with an event to mark the end. If you are doing a lesson on literature, break it down into manageable units and have some fun event to mark its ending. Take a break from a long task some day and do something fun that may or may not be related. Think of school as a very difficult cognitive activity for even the brightest of student; at some point you need to take a break from the cognitive task and have some fun. We do this all the time at home with chores. We grade lessons and then go to the movies or read a book.

Even high achieving students have a hard time being cognitively engaged every minute and need a break. Secondary teachers need to be very aware of the course requirements from their peers. No teacher ever intends to load a student with so much work that they break, but 6 or 7 teachers can do it easily.

Now until Spring Break may seem like an eternity for students and behavior will start to decline as this occurs. Try to have a little fun with students; it pays off in the long run. After Spring Break (the end of your story) it will seem like a race to the finish, so be careful to take care of yourself and look for signs of cognitive burn out in you and your students.

