

Transition Tips: New School Year

Supporting a successful transition back to school after the summer break for autistic students



1. Try to keep sleeping patterns to the same routine as much as possible during the last few weeks before school begins. Return to typical bedtime hours at least 3 days prior to the start of school, regardless of the age of your child/youth.
2. Remember to create a bedtime routine that includes quiet, calming activities like bathing, reading a book, and mindful activities before bed. Reduce screen time at least 2 hours beforehand, if possible. ([Example](#))
3. Continue to support routines and set expectations as you go through the summer, especially when you begin to plan for the transition back to school. Routines and expectations can become more flexible over the summer months, and resuming a formal schedule and setting expectations can be difficult as your child returns to school. Watch these videos for tips: [Building successful routines](#) and [setting expectations](#)
4. Use a calendar to mark the return to school so your child/youth can predict how their schedule will change in the coming days. ([Calendar example](#))
5. Consider introducing a visual schedule of the day, if you haven't been using one over the summer, to help your child/youth be more aware of what they will be doing each day. Eventually, add in some learning activities in preparation for school starting. ([Visual schedule pictures](#))
6. Talk about your child/youth's school, teachers, and peers. Show pictures of them if you have them, refamiliarizing your child/youth with people and places they will be going back to. Drive by the school and play in the yard.
7. If your child/youth has gotten a new toy or is interested in a new character or game, be sure to share this information with your child's/youth's teachers. Knowing your child's/youth's new interests or preferences is very helpful, as they can be incorporated in learning activities and used to help develop friendships with peers. ([Child reinforcement survey](#) - [youth reinforcement survey](#))
8. Help your child/youth create a good-feelings box that includes pictures, familiar objects, and affirmative statements that bring them joy and help when they are feeling overwhelmed or anxious. This box can be brought into school and shared with staff and/or kept in their classroom or locker. ([Good feelings box link](#))



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9. Fill out or create your own All About ME package that can be shared with your child's/youth's teachers to help inform them of their strengths, interests and communication needs. ([Child link](#) and [youth link](#))
10. Create a social story about returning to school, highlighting what your child/youth enjoys at school and identifying strategies they use as a reminder of what to do when feeling overwhelmed. This may be helpful to have on hand and review a few days in advance of school.
11. Before the start of school, start to plan what your child/youth will need to have ready the morning of the first day. Prepack their knapsack, having them participate in choosing what will go inside. Pick a location in your home close to the doorway where it can be placed and kept each day. Consider including this in their visual schedule. ([Ready for school](#))
12. If your child/youth will be taking transportation to school (school bus, special transportation, or city bus), consider what information they may need, what self-regulation strategies they could access during potentially hectic transitions, and what will help them to remember/understand the routine. If you have tips for your child's/youth's driver, consider writing them down and sharing them with the driver on the first day or beforehand. ([Article and resources for parents](#) and [tips for drivers](#))
13. Will your child/youth be expected to use a locker and have a lock? Practice following the directions to opening and closing the lock, and try putting it on a locker at your local recreation centre when they attend swimming or do other activities. ([Video](#))
14. Don't forget to talk about the school, staff, and activities in a positive way and reinforce your child/youth for positive thinking regarding school. It will be an exciting new year with lots of learning and fun!

