

## **www.autismhelp.info**

### **The transition to secondary school**

The move from primary to secondary school can be challenging for all students, but particularly so for those with autism spectrum disorder.

One or more of the following factors may cause additional pressure on students with ASD:

- **Large student population**  
Having to interact with older students.  
Feeling overwhelmed in the school grounds.  
School feels more crowded and noisy.
- **Bigger school grounds, unfamiliar surroundings**  
Difficulty navigating around school grounds. Anxiety about getting lost and being late to class.
- **Changing classrooms for each subject**  
High levels of anxiety and sensory arousal during changeover.  
Feeling more and more unsettled as the day progresses.  
Expected to move independently from classroom to classroom.  
Difficulty organising and remembering separate subject materials for each class.
- **Different teacher for each subject**  
Limited time to establish teacher / student relationship.  
Different teachers have different expectations concerning discipline, work requirements and presentation.
- **Increased homework expectations**  
Anxiety about completing extra work.
- **Increased awareness of being 'different', peer pressure to conform and be socially competent**  
May result in a feeling of being 'left behind' or excluded by peers, leading to social isolation or withdrawal.
- **Greater expectations for behaviour and academic achievement**  
Leads to increased anxiety.
- **Increased likelihood of being teased or bullied**  
May result in challenging behaviour, depression and/or poor self-esteem.
- **Mood and physical changes associated with puberty**  
Difficult coping with physical changes. Increases stress and anxiety levels.

### **Suggestions for a successful transition**

- **Planning meeting**  
This should involve parents and staff from both primary and secondary school. Complete a [Behavioural Profile Checklist](#) to identify challenging behaviour and skill deficits. Complete a

## [Student Summary Form](#)

### **Orientation activities**

Provide several opportunities for the student to become familiar with the new environment and teaching staff. Suggest parents videotape or photograph the tour. Provide the student with photos of each teacher, labelled with name and subject. Explain procedures for bus travel, school canteen, leaving class, going to toilets etc. Use additional visual supports if necessary.

### **Informed staff**

Teaching staff need training to improve empathy and increase understanding of ASD and its impact learning and behaviour. The 'What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?' section of this site makes a good starting point for educating teaching staff. Capitalise on the parent's expert knowledge of their child. Place a photo of the student in the staff room, along with notes about his difficulties / needs, or a copy of the [Student Summary Form](#). This will assist other teachers who may encounter the student in the school grounds. (Check with parents regarding privacy issues first.)

### **Identify a mentor or coach**

Appoint a suitable person to assist with organisational difficulties, social coaching and counselling after emotional incidents. This might be an integration aide, social worker or another staff member with the right skills to help the student.

### **Visual supports**

Use a visual diary / timetable and a map of the school grounds, mark routes on the map between classrooms. See [Education > Communication > Visual schedules](#) for more information.

### **Social skills training**

This might be incorporated within the school curriculum or a specific program for students with additional needs.

### **Reduce homework and assignment workload**

Allow the student to submit assignments and homework in a different format better suited to his learning style. See [Education > Middle Years > Homework](#) for more information.

### **Home base**

Create a resource room to be used as a safe time out place during the day when the student is feeling overwhelmed by noise, social interaction or peer pressure. See [Education < Behaviour Management > Creating a home base](#)