

TRANSITION CHECKLIST:

(From the book *Asperger Syndrome and Adolescence* by Myles and Adreon)

Creating a Successful Middle and High School Experience for Youth with Asperger Syndrome

PREPLANNING

Conducting or Reviewing Assessments

- Ensure that all staff who will be working with the youth understand the student's strengths and concerns.

Choosing Next Environment

- Visit different types of programs or programs at different schools to determine appropriate placement options.

Transition Planning Meeting

- Create the student's schedule. Careful attention should be paid to choosing specials and creating opportunities for "downtime" where the student can engage in preferred activities to decrease anxiety levels.
- Create, review, and/or revise the IEP or 504 Plan to ensure that all necessary adaptations and modifications are included (i.e., homework, class work, lunch, physical education, before-school activities).
- Identify a teacher or administrator who will serve as the primary school contact for the parent to discuss any problems or changes that may occur.
- Identify a team of individuals at the school who will serve as "safe persons."
- Schedule dates and content of training sessions for school personnel. Plan to complete all training before the first day of school – if possible, before student orientation.
- Plan an orientation schedule for the student. Many schools provide a general orientation for all students transitioning to middle school in the spring of the final year of elementary school. Students with AS need a more extensive orientation process than typical students. Suggestions for orientation activities are provided under Student Orientation. The majority of the orientation activities may be conducted during the week before the start of the school year.

Training for School Personnel

- Conduct a general orientation for all personnel at the school.

This training session should:

- Overview the characteristics of individuals with AS.
- Provide information on the specific behavioral, academic, and emotional concerns of the student.
- Include all teachers, counselors, administrators, office staff, cafeteria workers, security, etc. who will have contact with the students.
- Provide training on how to implement the strategies determined during the transition planning meeting and/or included in the student's IEP or 504 Plan. All teachers, counselors, and administrators in contact with the student should be present.

This training session should include information on:

- The specific, step-by-step procedure the student can use to seek out the safe person and get to home base
- The procedure to be followed for behavioral problems
- The procedure for ensuring that homework assignments are recorded and that required materials are brought home
- How to implement all academic modifications, accommodations, and supports
- Any other needs or issues that require discussion

Student Orientation

- Provide a walk-through of the student's daily schedule. In schools where the schedule changes from day to day, the student should have the opportunity to practice all possible schedules. If applicable, student "buddies" should be available to walk through the schedule with the student with AS.

The following are suggestions for the walk-through:

- Provide visual/written class schedule(s) for the student.
- Videotape a walk-through school schedule for the student to review at home.
- Practice route(s) from various classes to the bathroom, counselor's office, home base, etc.
- Meet all teachers and relevant personnel.
- Provide the student with pictures and names of all teachers in advance of the orientation.
- Provide the student with pictures and names of all support personnel, such as safe person, counselors, special education coordinators, assistant principals and principal, in advance of the orientation.
- Provide the student with pictures and names of all additional personnel, such as cafeteria workers, school nurse, etc.
- Provide the student with pictures and names of student "buddies."
- Show the student where her assigned seat in each classroom will be.
- Obtain information about school routines and rules (i.e., lunch, going to bathroom, before/after school, transportation).
- Provide instruction on the procedure for seeking out the safe person and home base.
- Practice use of transition to home base through role-play.

ACADEMIC MODIFICATONS

Priming

- Determine whether priming will help meet the student's need for predictability.
- Analyze student needs and classroom demands to determine which classes will require priming.
- Identify who will prime.
- Designate whether priming will use actual or similar materials.
- Determine where and when priming will occur.

Classroom Assignments

- Determine the student's needs concerning assignments.
- Provide the student with extra time to complete assignments.
- Shorten the length of assignments.
- Reduce the number of assignments.
- Break assignments into smaller segments.

- Provide samples/models of completed assignments and/or a list of specific criteria for successful completion.
- Allow the student to use the computer for schoolwork and/or homework.
- Allow the student to demonstrate mastery of concepts through alternate means (dictate essays, oral tests, etc.).

Note Taking

- Indicate the type of note taking supports needed by the student.
- Provide a complete outline.
- Give student a skeletal outline.
- Identify a peer who can take notes for the student.
- Allow student to use outlining software.

Graphic Organizers

- Determine whether graphic organizers are needed to facilitate skill acquisition and maintenance.
- Specify which type of graphic organizers will be needed:
 - Hierarchical
 - Conceptual
 - Sequential
 - Cyclical
 - Other
- Determine who will construct and provide organizer to student:
 - Teacher
 - Peer
 - Student with Template
 - Student with outlining software

Enrichment

- Determine the type of enrichment needed:
 - Specify how the enrichment area will be identified.
 - Determine when and how enrichment will be provided.
 - Decide whether a learning contract with specified working conditions is needed.

Homework

- Identify which class subjects will include homework responsibilities.
- Determine homework modifications:
 - Present homework assignments visually (on board, etc.) in addition to orally.
 - Provide the student with a homework sheet or planner.
 - Provide student with the assignment in written format.
 - Reduce the amount of homework.
 - Provide a study hall period to allow the student time to complete homework at school.
- Identify home strategy for completing homework:
 - Designate place and time for homework completion.
 - Define organization to get homework back to school.
 - Name contact if additional clarification on homework is needed.

MODIFICATIONS FOR UNSTRUCTURED OR LESS STRUCTURED TIMES

Transportation/Bus

- Identify who will teach the student the bus routine.
- Determine who will provide assistance for the student when the bus arrives at school, particularly on the first day. Have a peer or school staff greet the student at the bus and accompany him to the bus at the end of the day.
- Determine how long assistance will be needed in getting to and from the bus throughout the school year.
- Identify the peer or school personnel to be assigned to assist the student in this process, including backups.
- Provide a pickup or drop off closer to the student's house.
- Provide adult supervision at the bus stop.
- Provide a peer "buddy" from the student's neighborhood to wait with the student at the bus stop and sit with her on the bus.
- Provide preferential seating on the bus. This may include seating the student in close proximity to the driver or allowing her to sit in her own seat/row.
- Provide a monitor or aide on the bus.
- Provide a special bus.

Physical Education

- Consider whether to exempt the student from physical education and, if so, substitute another special or a study hall. This is particularly important if poor motor skills have led to teasing or rejection by peers.
- Assign the student a specific role for PE such as scorekeeper, equipment manager, etc. This allows him to participate in PE, but minimizes the motor and social demands of plying a sport.
- Assign teams rather than allow students to choose teams themselves.
- Have school personnel monitor, as least twice weekly, the student's perceptions of the PE period by asking her how she feels it is going.
- Help the student problem-solve difficulties.

Lunch

- Have school personnel available during the first week of school to assist the student in navigating the cafeteria line, finding a place to sit, and engaging in an appropriate activity once he has finished eating.
- Help the student identify school personnel whom she can approach during the lunch period when encountering problems.
- Have school personnel closely monitor the student's interactions with peers and intervene when problems occur.
- Have school personnel closely monitor the student and intervene when she becomes stressed and overwhelmed or begins to experience sensory overload.
- Have school personnel monitor, as least twice weekly, the student's perceptions of the lunch period by asking the student how he/she feels it is going.
- Help the student problem-solve any difficulties.
- Provide assigned seating with a preferred friend, away from problem peers and/or near adult supervision.
- Provide peer "buddy/buddies" during lunchtime.
- Allow the student to leave the cafeteria once he has finished eating to engage in a calming or preferred activity (e.g., go to media center, computer lab).

- Allow the student to eat lunch in an alternative location if necessary (e.g., counselor's office, media center).

Changing Classes

- Provide peer or teacher assistance (particularly during the first week of school) to help the student manage the crowded hallways, open locker, locate the proper materials, and find the correct classroom.
- Provide a peer "buddy" to accompany the student during class changes if he continues to experience difficulty during this time. This "buddy" might assist the student with organizational issues, protect against teasing/bullying by other students, and help promote positive social interactions.
- Provide the student with additional time for class changes.
- Allow alternate passing time when the hallways are free from other students. For example, the student might change classes before or after the general transition period.

Changes in Routine

- Specify whether the student needs to be informed of any changes in typical classroom procedures (assemblies, fire drills, guest speakers, seating changes, substitute teacher).
- Determine what additional supports the student needs when changes occur.

Before and After School

- Identify when the student should arrive at school.
- Determine whether a specific room will be used during this time.
- Identify peers to support the student at this time.
- Provide structured activities.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORTS

Preferential Seating

- Determine if preferential seating is necessary:
 - Identify location.
 - Identify peers who can support student.

Organizational Strategies

- Determine the student's needs concerning organization of papers and materials.
- Provide assistance in organizing the backpack, locker, and/or desk and teach the student to do so independently.
- Teach the student to use timelines.
- Instruct the student on how to develop a to-do list.

Home Base

- Identify when home base will be used:
 - Before school or early morning
 - Following specific classes
 - At the end of the day
- Determine cue to prompt home base.
- Determine home base location.
- Identify activities that will occur during home base.

Safe Person

- Identify a safe person.
- Determine the role of the safe person, to possibly include:
 - Social skills training
 - Social skills interpretation
 - Active listening
 - Calming of the student
 - Sensory support

Visual Supports

- Identify which supports are needed:
 - Map of school outlining classes
 - List of classes, room numbers, books, and other supplies
 - List of teacher expectations and routines for each class
 - Outlines and notes from lectures
 - Model of assignments
 - Test reminders
 - Schedule changes
 - Homework instructions
 - Cue to home base

Travel Card

- Identify special educator role.
- Determine student role.
- Identify general educator participation.
- Define parent role.

SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Hidden Curriculum

- Identify hidden curriculum items.
- Define who will teach hidden curriculum.
- Determine when instruction will occur.

Circle of Friends

- Provide awareness training to peers.
- Identify peers to participate in Circle of Friends.
- Determine when Circle of Friends is needed to support student.

Social Skills Instruction

- Determine need for direct instruction:
 - Identify curricula.
 - Determine social skills instructor.
 - Determine when social skills instruction will occur.
- Determine if acting lessons may support social skills instruction:
 - Identify coach's need for AS awareness training.
 - Provide awareness training to other student actors.

- Consider whether social stories are a viable means of instruction:
 - Identify individual who can create social stories.
 - Determine how the need for a social story will be communicated.
 - Determine who will monitor social story effectiveness.

Social Skills Interpretation

- Determine social skills interpreter.
- Ensure social skills interpreter knows how to use (a) cartooning, (b) social autopsies, (c) SOCCSS, and (d) sensory awareness.
- Identify when student will have access to the social skills interpreter:
 - Scheduled time
 - As needed

Student Orientation

Getting used to change and new situations is always easier and less threatening given proper advance notice and preparation. Nowhere is this truer than for adolescents with AS who are transitioning to middle or high school. As we have mentioned through out this book, the AS student's need for routine, sameness, and predictability is severely challenged during times of change. To reduce the student's anxiety upon entering a new school at a very vulnerable age, a sound orientation program conducted well in advance of the actual transition is essential. Such orientation should include familiarization with the physical setting of the school and in grounds, introduction to all pertinent teachers and staff, and explanation of rules for behavior as well as academic performance (Adreon & Stella, 2001). As indicated in the checklist, other helpful topics of student orientation include meeting with peer "buddies" sharing names and possibly photos of "safe persons," and so on.

SUMMARY

The planning process described here may seem extensive and time-consuming. It is! For adolescents with AS, it is necessary that each of the items on the Transition Checklist be considered before the student moves into a new school environment. The complexity of Asperger Syndrome requires that parents and school professionals view all phases of the environment to ensure that modifications are in place to help the student have a successful school experience.

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