



Coronavirus (COVID-19)

For parents/carers

8 ways to prepare your autistic child for going back to school

Many autistic children find changes to their routine and environment challenging. This year there's been a lot of change and uncertainty. You can support your child by preparing them in the following ways.

1. Talk to your child's school

The school may have the answers to many of your, or your child's, questions. For example, "Can I walk my child to their classroom in the morning?" Review any information that the school has sent about changes to the school routine and use it to answer your child's questions. If anything is unclear, or you or your child still have questions - talk to your child's teacher or the school.

2. Communicate with your child

Communicate with your child about going back to school. You may communicate about the changes by talking, using a communication device, or another form of communication. Help your child to identify any questions, feelings or worries they have. Think about how you can support them.

Reassure them that the school is doing everything they can to keep them safe. Be positive and have ongoing communication with your child. If talking isn't your child's main way of communicating, you could text, email, write them a letter, draw or use art to start a conversation.

3. Routines

Provide clear information about new routines at school. The timetable and bell times may be different. The teachers may be different. Drop-off and pick-up times and places may be different.

Prepare your child by describing how their routine might change and what the new routine might look like. You might want to break the new routine into small steps so your child has time to process the changes. For example, if

pick-up time or location has changed, write down or mark on a map/picture where you will pick them up, where to wait, the time you will pick them up, and what to do if something changes.

There will be new social distancing rules for parents and carers, plus hand washing rules for students at school. These rules aim to reduce exposure to coronavirus (COVID-19). Explore with your child what they understand to help them make sense of the new rules and routines.

A social script with simple text and pictures is another way that you can introduce new events and situations.

Read the Amaze resource “Using a social script to explain a new situation” for more information.

4. Schedules

Written or visual schedules can help to make new routines clear.

You could create them:

- For the timetable, break times, and new hygiene practices such as hand washing.
- For new morning and after school routines.
- With your child by writing down the steps and/or drawing a picture for each step. Your child could keep the schedule in their pocket, school bag or lunch box to use at school.

National Autistic Society in the UK has some examples of visual schedules.

5. Supports

Consider:

- What supports will help your child? Talk about supports with your child and the school.
- Which staff member can they go to for help in the class or play times?
- Other supports could be sensory breaks, quiet spaces, or movement breaks. Your child could relax with their interests or favourite toy(s). Talk about how your child can let their teacher know that they need a break, and let the teacher know what this request may look like.

Here are some other ideas for thinking about supports:

- Review your child's previous supports with your child's teacher and consider any new ones that may be needed due to new routines. You may like to suggest that these are written down in a short transition plan.
- Contact your child's school to request a Student Support Group meeting.
- Think about whether your child needs a staggered or part-time return to school. On the first day back at school an early or late start, when there are less students, could be helpful. Talk to your school about the best options for your child.
- Ask your child's therapists about resources or strategies that could support you, your child or the school with new routines and rules.

6. A transition plan

A Student Support Group meeting can be a great way to talk about this information and put it in a written transition plan for your child. A transition plan may include all supports, all adjustments, and any adjusted school hours. It may also include information on how to support your child if they become overwhelmed or anxious. The plan should state clearly what each person will do. You might like to include a new one-page profile of your child in the plan.

7. Practise

To support your child to get used to the idea of going to school again you could:

- Visit or go past the school with your child.
- Call the school and ask if you and your child can visit the school before school starts and meet your child's teacher(s).
- Set their school wake up alarm and let your child practise getting up and dressed in their school uniform.
- Ask your child to check their school bag before school starts to ensure they have everything they need - text books, pencils, lunch, etc.

8. Understanding

The return to school will be challenging for everyone, but may be more so for autistic children. Be understanding of any changes to your child's behaviour. Let them know that you understand they feel anxious, reassure them and find time for relaxation and fun.

Think about whether your child needs quiet time after school and on weekends as they adjust to these changes. As you support your child you may need some time to recharge as well. Amaze's Autism Advisors are available for advice and information. See the contact below.

Need help with the transition back to school?

Go to <http://www.amaze.org.au/returntoschool2020>

Amaze Autism Advisors

Contact the Amaze Autism Advisors for more information about autism, or to discuss your individual situation:

Phone: **1300 308 699**

Email: info@amaze.org.au

Website and webchat: www.amaze.org.au

This service is available from 8am to 7pm, Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays).

Victorian Department of Education learning from home advice line for parents

If you have questions about learning from home, call the advice phone line for parents on **1800 338 663**.



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