



WSPCF Guide for Parent Carers
on the West Sussex Autism and Social
Communication Team's (ASCT) Transition Toolkit

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This guide has been written by the West Sussex Parent Carer Forum (WSPCF), a parent carer led organisation that represents families of children and young people (0-25) with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) across West Sussex.

This guide has two main purposes:

1. To give you practical information and tips to help your child or young person manage transitions successfully.
2. To show you how you can use the ASCT Transition Toolkit at home and in partnership with your child's setting.

The Toolkit has been developed by the Autism and Social Communication Team (ASCT) as part of the Autism in Schools Project. It is designed to help school staff and other professionals better support autistic children and young people during times of change (a transition). The Toolkit is suitable for all children and young people, whether diagnosed or undiagnosed.

At WSPCF, we know that children and young people do best when the support offered at home mirrors what is happening at school and vice versa. That's why we've created this guidance, to give you tips and ideas for managing transitions and to help you use the ASCT Toolkit at home, working in partnership with your child's setting.

This guide will help you to:

- Understand what a transition is, why your child or young person might find it difficult, and how you can support them.
- Know what good transition planning looks like and what support should be available at key stages, whether starting nursery, moving up to primary or secondary school, or preparing for college.
- Communicate effectively and collaborate with settings and professionals to plan ahead.
- Take action, if you have concerns or feel your child or young person's needs aren't being met.
- Use the Toolkit at home and alongside your child's setting to support consistent approaches.

Whether you're just starting to think about your child's next step, or you're in the middle of a transition journey, this guide is here to support you. Remember, you know your child or young person best, you've seen what helps them thrive and what makes them anxious. Your input is really important in creating a transition plan that works for your child or young person. Here is the link to the ASCT Transition toolkit: <https://schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Page/19632>

What are transitions?

Transitions are part of everyday life, they simply mean moving from one thing to another, whether it's a change in environment, activity, or expectation. For children and young people, this could be anything from getting out of bed in the morning, to starting a new school or preparing for adulthood/college.

It's well known that many autistic children and young people find transitions especially challenging. Even small changes can feel overwhelming, and the number of transitions they face each day; at home, in school, and in the community can have a big impact on how they cope and engage with the world around them.

Change can be difficult for all of us. When something feels unfamiliar, our brains may treat it as a threat, triggering stress or anxiety. That's why one of the most important parts of transition planning is helping to make the unfamiliar more familiar, reducing worry and building confidence.

Positive transition planning should always centre around your child or young person. Their voice, preferences, and needs matter. With the right support, transitions can become opportunities for growth, not just moments of stress.

How can the ASCT Toolkit help me and my child?

The Toolkit is full of practical ideas and helpful information about how schools and settings can support children and young people through times of change, whether that's daily transitions like moving between lessons, or bigger ones like starting a new school.

It also recognises how important your role is as a parent carer. You know what helps your child or young person feel safe, what causes them stress, and what support makes a difference. Your insight is a huge asset to teachers and professionals when planning transitions.

The Toolkit also includes strategies you can try at home and suggestions you might want to share with your child or young person's teacher or support staff. You don't need to use every part, just the bits that feel most useful for your child's needs. It's designed to help you work together with the setting, build consistency, and make transitions feel more manageable for everyone.



Getting started

Communicating effectively with your child or young person's setting can make a big difference. Here are some practical tips:

- Start early and keep it positive, work towards shared goals.
- Be clear and specific, share what works at home and what triggers stress.
- Use collaborative language. Instead of "You need to...", try "Could we explore..." or "How can we work together on this?"
- Bring written notes, a short bullet list of your child's needs and strategies that work at home can help staff remember key points.
- Ask for updates, agree with the setting on how and when you'll check in (email, phone, or meetings).

Then, think about your child or young person and ask yourself the following questions:

- What key stage are they currently in?
- Which transitions do they find most challenging, daily routines, classroom changes, or bigger moves like starting a new school or college?
- What kind of support, strategies, or advice are you hoping to find?

Once you've thought about these things, use the Contents page of the ASCT Toolkit to guide you. You don't need to read the whole document cover to cover, just head straight to the sections that match your child's needs. For example:

- If they're struggling with daily transitions like arriving at school or changing activities, see pgs.11 and 15.
- For help with unexpected changes, such as a different teacher or a change in routine, check out the Unexpected Transitions section, see pg.13.
- If your child is moving between year groups or schools, the Academic Year Transitions section offers practical ideas and timelines, see pg.16.
- To help make unfamiliar situations feel safer and more predictable, explore the Building Familiarity section, see pg.17.
- If your child is moving from Secondary to Further Education or College, go directly to that section for tailored advice and checklists, see pg.26.

The Key Strategies section, see pg.11, is especially useful. It lists actions schools can take that you might not be aware of and includes approaches you can try at home. These strategies are designed to reduce anxiety, build confidence, and support smoother transitions, all with your child or young person at the centre.

You'll soon find ideas that suit your child or young person's stage and situation, helping you feel more prepared and empowered to work in partnership with their setting.

Parent carer transition tips

We have written these tips based on what families have shared with us, but each child is an individual, and what works for one child or young person may not work for another. Whether you're preparing for a new term, a change in classroom, setting, or just want to make mornings less stressful, these tips are here to support you. Let's take it one step at a time.

Managing transitions at home and daily routines

Daily transitions can be tough for many children and young people, especially autistic learners. The most challenging time is often getting ready for school in the morning, but other tricky moments include:

- Leaving the house for any reason
- Going to bed
- Stopping a preferred activity

These changes can feel overwhelming and lead to anxiety for both children and parent carers.



Why transitions are difficult

Transitions take extra mental effort. Sudden changes can make your child feel stressed and less able to stay calm or move on to the next activity.

Practical strategies for home

1. Use visual supports and adapt your communication

Visual timetables, tick charts, or apps can help children understand what's coming next, and when your child struggles to process spoken words during transitions, visual cues can reduce stress.

If these feel hard to maintain, try using everyday items (Objects of Reference), to signal the next step (e.g., handing your child a toothbrush to show it's time to brush teeth). (<https://childrenscommunitytherapies.uhb.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/Objects-of-Reference.pdf>). This is generally used with younger children, so for older children, use declarative language, which is where you share information rather than giving commands. Find out more about this in the ASCT Toolkit: pg. 21

2. Prepare ahead, stay calm and allow time

Do as much as possible, as early as possible – e.g. the night or day before, as children or young people usually feel calmer when they know what to expect and are well prepared. This will also help you to feel less stressed which is important, as your calm presence helps your child or young person regulate. Think about your breathing (and theirs) and avoid rushing, extra time reduces pressure.

3. Create a safe space

Provide a quiet, “low-arousal” space for your child to retreat to, some children or young people prefer minimal stimulation, while others feel comforted by familiar items. If space is limited, consider a pop-up tent.

4. Build predictable routines

Try to do things in the same order each time you leave the house, consistency reduces anxiety and the need for repeated prompting.

If you are struggling with daily transitions, particularly the morning ones and worried that your child is at risk of Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), you should talk to your child's school. There is more information about EBSA here:

<https://schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Page/10483>

Transitions between year groups within a setting

It can be really challenging for children to transition between classes or year groups within a setting. The classrooms often look very different, there will be new adults, and new children or young people.

Ask the school:

- Are there any photos of the new classroom that can be given to my child or young person to take home?
- Are there any one-page bios (“All About Me” documents) about the staff in the new class that can be given to my child or young person?
- Can my child or young person have an extra visit to the new classroom, either on their own or in a small group?
- Will my child or young person be in class with all the same students they are with now, or will some of them be different?
- What is different about the new classroom? Are there new or different rules? e.g. in a Science Lab. Can my child or young person be supported by school staff to talk about what might be hard for them in the new classroom?
- Are there things in the new classroom that can help my child or young person feel calm? How will this be communicated to them? I would like to be able to talk to my child or young person about what to do when they are finding things hard at school.
- Your child or young person may need support at home that they don't require in school, or they might have needed help in the past but not right now. It's worth letting their new teacher know, just in case those needs return for a short time.
- If you are still concerned, you could look at the strategies on pages 10–13 of the Transition Toolkit.



Transitions between year groups within a setting

Moving from one setting to another, such as nursery to school, primary to secondary, or school to college, can be exciting but also challenging for children and young people. Planning ahead and good communication between settings can make a big difference.

Questions to ask the current setting

- What are they doing to support the transition?
- Have they created a visual transition pathway or booklet? If so, ask for a copy to use at home.
- Have they shared information with the new setting about your child's needs? Ask to see this and add anything missing. Include details about your child or young person's likes, favourite stories, and special interests, these help new staff build rapport.

Questions to ask the new setting

- Are additional visits available?
- What systems will they use to support your child?
- Who should you contact if things are difficult?
- Will there be a pupil passport? Can you help write it?

Plan ahead for success

- For nursery to school transitions, help your child to expect similar routines but more structure (e.g., sitting on the rug, moving around a larger building).
- If your child is on the SEND register, you can attend secondary school open days in Year 5.
- Even if the setting has a strong transition plan, your child or young person may not want to discuss it at home, and that's completely normal. Rather than pushing, check with staff first to make sure they're engaging in transition activities.



Practical Strategies for secondary and college settings

- Discuss independence skills: using money, navigating timetables, making choices in the cafeteria.
- Plan for sensory needs: quieter lunch spaces, leaving lessons early to avoid busy corridors, toilet passes.
- Use social stories or visual supports for routines and expectations.
- Explain that additional support staff may help with Annual Reviews and Exam Access Arrangements (EAA) updates.

School to college transition specifically

Starting college is a big step for any young person. It brings new routines, different expectations, unfamiliar environments, and more independence. This can feel exciting, but also overwhelming. Here are some ways to help prepare your young person:

Before Applying

- Explore options early (Find It Out Centre, SENDIAS Young Person Advisor).
- Attend open days/evenings; request quieter times if needed.

When Applying

- Tick the box for additional support on applications.
- Ask if the college will arrange a meeting with support staff.
- Share EHCP or support needs early.

Once a Course Is Chosen

- Provide documentation: EHCP, Annual Reviews, Pupil Passport, Exam Access Arrangements (EAA).

Further Information

For anyone seeking further information, we recommend you go to the Appendices on page 30 of the ASCT Toolkit, which has lots of useful resources including social stories, videos, websites and books.

You may also find it useful to explore the WSPCF Guide to SEND Support in Mainstream Settings. This is a practical guide for parent carers, based on the West Sussex Ordinarily Available Inclusive Practice (OAIP), to help you understand, navigate and make use of the support your child should receive in mainstream education. <https://www.wspcf.org.uk/wspcf-guides/>

There's a lot to take in, and every child or young person's journey is different - but these guides are here to help you feel more informed, more confident, and more empowered to have meaningful conversations. Whether you're raising concerns, sharing insights, or planning ahead, your voice matters.

What to Do if You're Worried

If you feel your child or young person's needs aren't being met in relation to transitions:

- Talk to the class teacher or SENCO first, share your concerns calmly and ask what steps are being taken.
- Refer to the ASCT Toolkit, point out strategies that could help and ask if they can be implemented.
- Request a meeting if things don't improve, ask for a meeting with the SENCO and, if relevant, the Head of Year.
- Seek advice, contact SENDIAS for impartial guidance, <https://westsussexsendias.org/>
- Review the EHCP or support plan (if your young person has one), and you can request an early review.



Feedback and Next Steps:

Thank you for using the WSPCF Parent Carer Guide to the ASCT Transition Toolkit.

WSPCF exists to:

- Champion parent carers' views
- Influence local services and policy
- Coproduce solutions with the Local Authority and NHS
- Support families through information, events and consultation

Your feedback helps us:

- Improve this guide and make it more useful
- Understand what's working (and what's not) in local SEND support
- Represent your experiences in meetings with decision makers
- Shape future resources and training

How to Share Your Feedback

We'd love to hear:

- What you found helpful in this guide
- What could be clearer or more useful
- What support you need next
- Your experiences

You can share feedback by:

- Emailing us at: office@wspcf.org.uk
- Joining one of our events: <https://www.wspcf.org.uk/our-events/>
- Filling in a form (available on our website):
<https://www.wspcf.org.uk/have-your-voice-heard/>



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