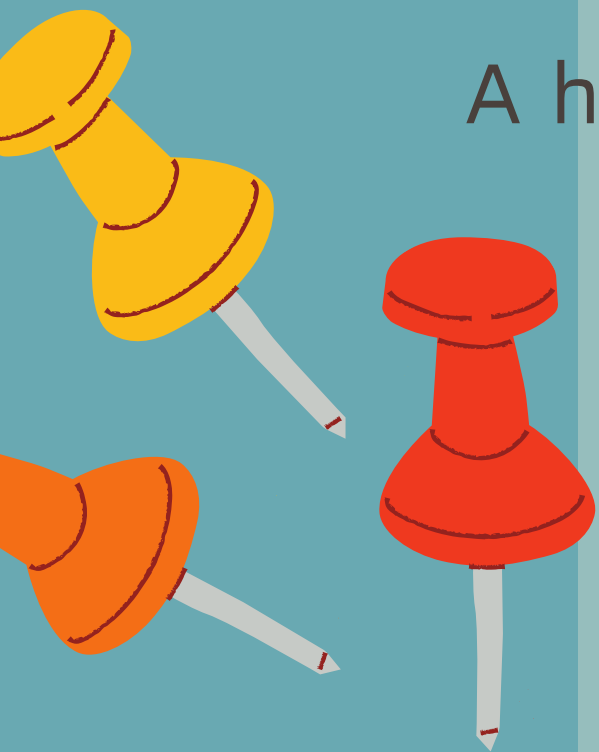


TRANSITIONS

CORONAVIRUS EDITION

A helpful guide on how to help your child transition back to school.



OVERVIEW

The next few weeks (and possibly months) will be a particularly difficult time for children and families, whilst schools begin to re-open and changes are made to prevent further spread of the virus.

This information pack aims to support parents and carers of children with autism during this transition period and will hopefully make things a little more manageable.

Within this document you will find:

- Why children with autism find transitions difficult
- Tips and ideas to help with transition
- Maintaining a structure and routine
- Graded exposure method
- Useful templates
- Useful references and links



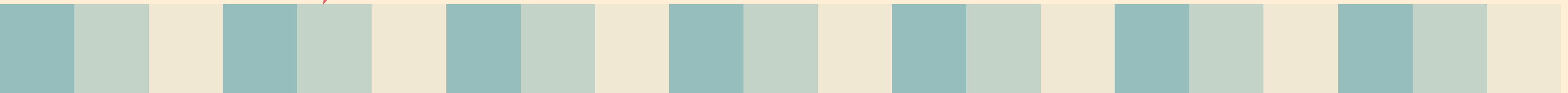
AUTISM AND TRANSITIONS

For some children, transitioning back into a school routine following a long break may not cause any difficulties. But for some, they may find this very challenging. With autism, the difficulty with making transitions is not intentional. Instead, the child struggles with making the cognitive adjustments necessary to move on. As a consequence, transitions in autism are often plagued with stress, anxiety, and frustration.

The neuropsychological process known as the 'Executive Function' is heavily involved in making transitions. This function helps the brain to shift and reallocate attention and other brain resources when required. In autism, there are often gaps in this system. Because of these gaps, the brain may struggle with stopping one task and transferring attention and other thought processes onto another.



Communication is key during this transition period and will help to ensure a smooth return to school.



PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR RETURNING TO SCHOOL

With plans being made to reopen schools for more pupils, as a parent or carer you may feel concerned about your child returning to school, especially if they find change difficult to handle. Here are some tips and suggestions that you can do to help prepare your child and to gain a sense of control over the uncertainties:

- **Find out your child's worries:** Once you know their concerns, you can provide them with information and reassurance to help them feel safe at school.
- **Share your family's lockdown experience with teachers and support staff:** sharing any difficulties that you have faced during lockdown will help school staff provide the support your child needs. Similarly, if there were certain activities that helped calm your child or helped improve their focus, then share this with their teacher.
- **Think about what will be the same:** for instance, their teachers and school uniform. Focusing on this first will be reassuring and help reduce anxiety.



PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR RETURNING TO SCHOOL

- **Work collaboratively with school:** speak to your child's teacher to agree a 'return to school' plan. See if it's possible to visit the school to see any new changes. Alternatively, you could ask your child's teacher to send you photos of any changes that are being made so that your child feels prepared and knows what to expect.
- **Consider how changes to school routines and activities will affect your child:** for instance, there could be new rules about entering and moving around school. Help your child to understand those changes to their school day and why they are happening. We have included some templates you can use further on in this pack.
- **Use your child's preferred communication method:** this could be symbols, photos or videos. Social stories can help children understand and cope with changes (turn to the next page for some examples).
- **Arrange suitable travel to school:** best to avoid school buses for the first few days. Getting a lift, riding a bike or walking are good alternatives.
- **After their first day:** plan a really nice activity after your child's first day at school as a reward for going back in.



SOCIAL STORIES

Social stories and comic strip conversations are helpful when explaining changes in routine and can help with planning and organising. Below are some examples that you can adapt to meet child's needs:

Transition back to school after lockdown (early years through to college):

- <http://www.starsteam.org.uk/coronavirus-resources>

School is opening

- <https://static.lgfl.net/Covid19%20Social%20Story%20School%20is%20Opening.pdf>
- <https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Coronavirus-back-to-school.pdf>

Social distancing

- <http://www.starsteam.org.uk/media/What%20is%20social%20distancing%20Social%20Story%20Oby%20London%20Grid%20for%20Learning.pdf>

Feeling unwell/sick

- http://livingwellwithautism.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/when_i_feel_sick.224174633.pdf
- <https://www.autism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Feeling-Sick-COVID-19.pdf>



STRUCTURE AND ROUTINE

Visual timetables

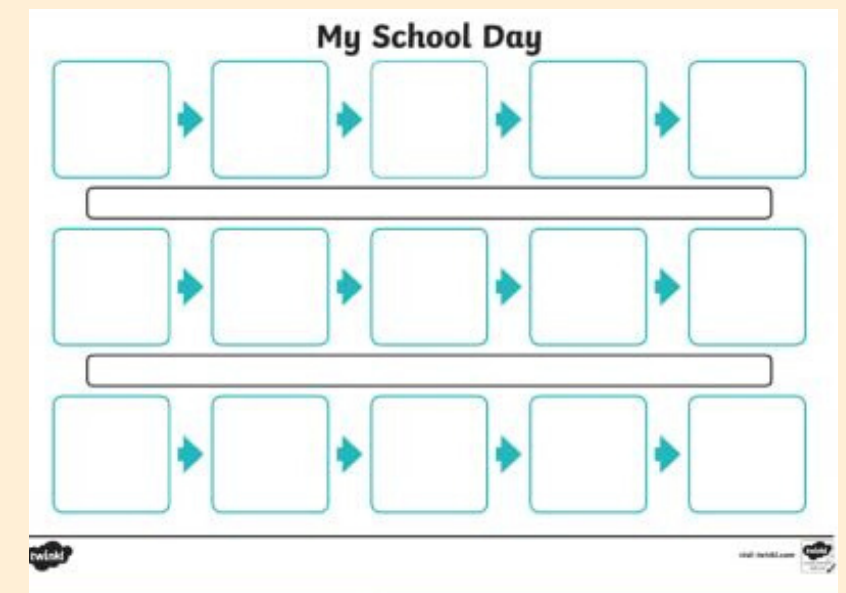
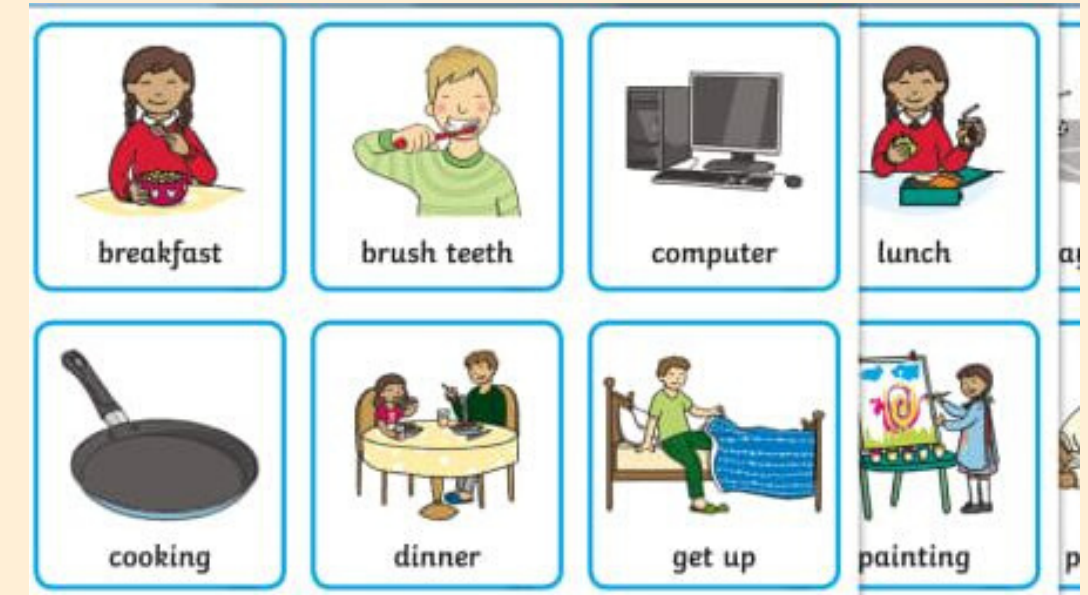
It is possible to reduce some of the anxiety that your child may feel with the change to their newly adjusted routine by making use of a visual timetables.

Visual timetables work best by breaking your day into smaller routines;

- Morning routine
- New school day
- When you are home from school
- Bedtime routine

We have included some templates of visual timetables you can use further on in this pack, as well as links for various pictures/symbols that you can use to place on your timetable.

If you feel your child is too old for a visual timetable try using a daily diary so you can enter the tasks that need to be completed.



STRUCTURE AND ROUTINE

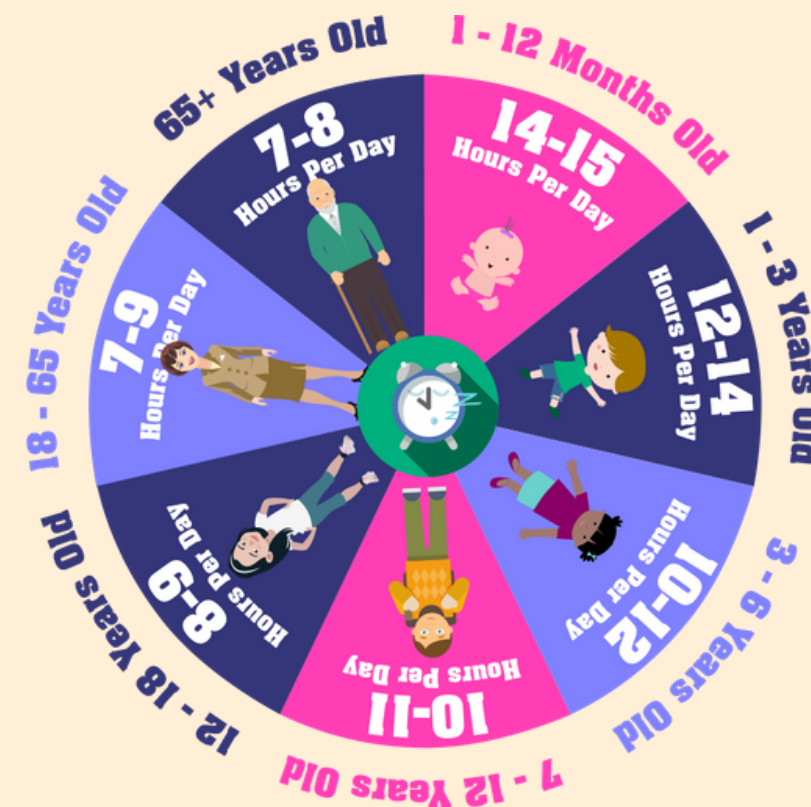
Sleep/bedtime routine

Sleep is one of the most important ways of keeping healthy and happy.

By having a set sleep routine we are insuring that our children have the best start to the next day.

During sleep our bodies recharge and our brains process all of the information that it has received during the day.

By using a similar schedule to this one, your child is able to see what is expected of them and when it is expected.



Bed Time Routine

6pm	Bath time		
6.30pm	Pyjamas on		
6.40pm	Water and Snack		
6.45pm	Sensory time		
7.15pm	Clean teeth		
7.20pm	Get into Bed		
7.25 pm	Story Time		
7.45pm	Time for sleep		
6.30am	Wake up		

GRADED EXPOSURE METHOD

Graded exposure is a common technique used in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to treat a range of anxiety problems.

- The idea of graded exposure is to introduce your child to their fears in small, gradual steps so they eventually become less overwhelming.
- Graded exposure can be a helpful way to manage difficult transitions by breaking a big goal (such as returning to school after a long break) down into smaller, more manageable ones. For example, if your child is extremely anxious about returning to school, then speak to school about having a gradual transition or phased return, e.g. a reduced timetable to start with and gradually attend more lessons day by day.
- This method can also be useful to use at home, such as returning to a normal sleep routine.

Tips

1. Make the first step easy - the first exposure must be successful.
2. Remember to celebrate each step and reward your child's hard work.
3. Changes don't always happen straight away, it may take some time so remember to be patient with your child.



USEFUL TEMPLATES

Visual Timetables

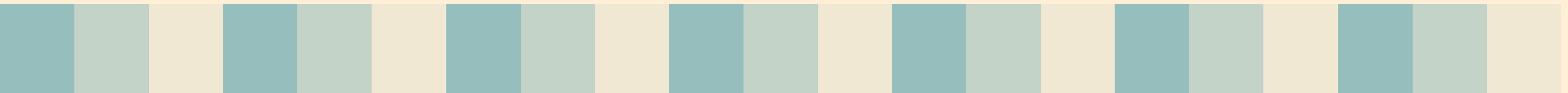
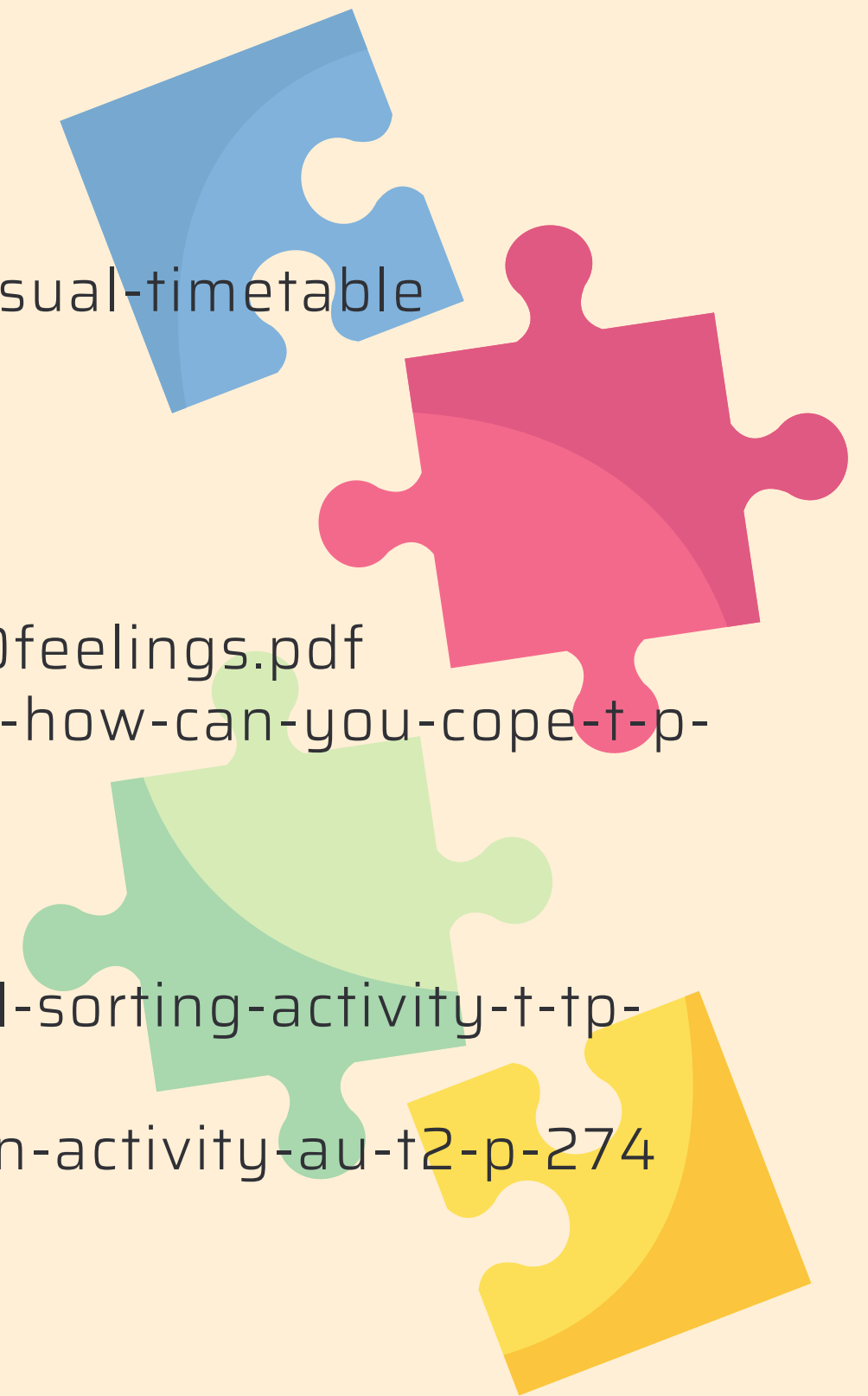
- <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/class-management/daily-routine/visual-timetable>
- <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/visual-supports.aspx>
- <https://do2learn.com/picturecards/VisualSchedules/index.htm>

Feelings and emotions exercises

- <https://www.reachoutasc.com/attachments/article/13/About%20my%20feelings.pdf>
- <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/covid-19-what-are-your-worries-and-how-can-you-cope-t-p-810>

Creating New Rules

- <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/safe-and-unsafe-returning-to-school-sorting-activity-t-tp-2549948>
- <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/staying-safe-at-school-poster-design-activity-au-t2-p-274>



FURTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES

Our Mental Health in School's Team have made a series of short videos about returning to school

- https://www.youtube.com/user/DorsetHealthCare/videos?disable_polymer=1

Back to school check-in

- <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ay6XuEBEYFhx7FINrxTkDScxdvnnv9oI/view>

Managing unexpected endings and transitions

- <https://www.annafreud.org/media/11610/managing-unexpected-endings-transitions-may2020.pdf>
- <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/transition.aspx>

Returning to school social situation

- <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/returning-to-school-social-situation-t-s-2548814>

Handwashing

- <https://www.schuelke.com/gb-en/news-media/news/Legal-Framework.php>
- <https://www.sensoryintegration.org.uk/News/8821506>

To keep up-to-date with Government advice on children's return to school

- <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/education-and-childcare>