

Helping individuals on the Autistic Spectrum cope with change

A common attribute amongst individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is that they do not like sudden change. When they experience change it often causes confusion, anxiety and distress and can lead to challenging behaviour. For some, it may be minor changes, such as taking a different route home in the car, or seeing furniture moved to a different place in the room. For others, it may be a change in their routine that they find confusing. On some occasions it is not possible to prepare for change and sometimes the change may be so minor that no one has even thought about preparing for it. However, for many events there are ways to prepare individuals for change and ways of dealing with change when it happens without notice. Preparation for change can be done in a number of ways. Using visuals, social stories, or written guidelines is a good way to prepare individuals for changes in their routine. Let us look at some examples:

Problem 1.

John is going shopping with his mother, which he does every Wednesday afternoon after school. Usually mum travels to the same supermarket and then goes straight home. If mum deviates from this simple routine, or takes a different route home John becomes very anxious and upset, and cries and screams. This Wednesday mum has to visit grandma on her way back from the supermarket and she knows that John will not like this change in the routine. So what does she do?

Solution

John's mum already uses visuals and visual schedules to help him understand and follow guidelines. She uses a daily visual schedule at home to show John what will be happening that day. When she is putting the pictures on John's daily schedule for Wednesday, she always includes the shopping trip, but this week she also adds a picture of grandma between the supermarket and the home picture. She also points out the change to John when she talks him through his schedule in the morning.



First we go to the Supermarket



Then we will visit Grandma



Then we will go home



Mum also has a smaller schedule with velcro attachments for the pictures, which she keeps in her handbag. On this schedule she puts three pictures, the supermarket, grandma, and a picture of home. Before mum leaves for the supermarket she shows John the 3 picture schedule. When mum leaves the supermarket she shows John the schedule again and takes the picture of the supermarket off. She then explains to John that they are going to see grandma. If John becomes anxious during the journey, mum shows him the schedule again and says “first we are going to see grandma, and then we are going home”.

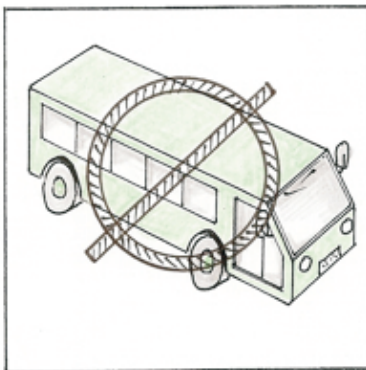
Problem 2.

Alan is an adult with ASD. He is at the Day Centre and is due to leave on the bus to go home at 3-o'clock. There is a mix up and the bus leaves without taking Alan. Alan is extremely distressed.

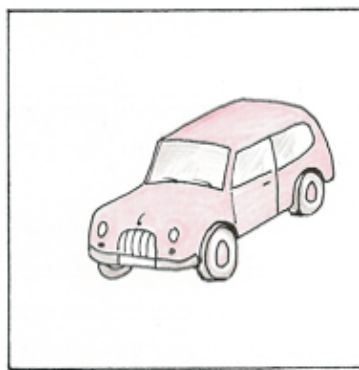
Solution

A staff member gets some pre-made visuals from a visuals book that is at the day-centre. The staff member creates a visual schedule that shows Alan that today they can watch TV together first and then the bus will come back and take Alan home or,

The staff member shows Alan some visuals that tell him that today he is going home in the car, and the staff member gives Alan a lift home.



Today we are not taking the bus.



We are going by car.



And we will be going straight to your home.

These are just simple examples of how deal with change. Often just altering an individuals daily timetable will be enough. For some individuals, using a social story is very helpful (see more about social stories on www.icommunicatetherapy.com). Other individuals have good literacy skills and just a written message will be sufficient. Written messages can be very useful because they can be done quickly at any time, which means that if change happens suddenly it can be dealt with immediately.

For more ideas and programs to facilitate individuals with autism spectrum disorder see www.icommunicatetherapy.com



To learn more about autism, autistic spectrum disorders and strategies to enhance communication, you can read about and purchase books on our website www.icommunicatetherapy.com. Click this link to see our online Resource Centre **Book Shop**

Suggested Reading:

1001 Great Ideas for Teaching and Raising Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders by Veronica Zysk and Ellen Notbohm

Playing, Laughing and Learning With Children on the Autism Spectrum: A Practical Resource of Play Ideas for Parents and Carers by Julia Moor

Overcoming Autism: Finding the Answers, Strategies, and Hope That Can Transform a Child's life by Lynn Kern Koegel and Claire LaZebnik

Self-Help Skills for People With Autism: A Systematic Teaching Approach by Stephen R. Anderson, Amy L. Jablonski, Vicki Madaus Knapp, and Marcus L Thomeer

Activity Schedules for Children With Autism: Teaching Independent Behavior by Lynn E., Ph.D. McClannahan and Patricia J., Ph.D. Krantz

Visual Supports for People With Autism: A Guide for Parents and Professionals by Marlene J. Cohen and Donna L. Sloan

Making Visual Supports Work in the Home and Community: Strategies for Individuals with Autism and Asperger Syndrome by Jennifer L. Savner, Brenda Smith Hyles, and Brenda Smith Myles

A Picture's Worth: PECS and Other Visual Communication Strategies in Autism (Topics in Autism) by Andy, Ph.D. Bondy and Lori Frost

Solving Behavior Problems in Autism (Visual Strategies Series) by Linda A. Hodgdon

Visual Language in Autism by Howard C. Shane and Sharon Weiss-Kapp

The New Social Story Book : Illustrated Edition by Carol Gray

My Social Stories Book by Abbie Leigh White, Carol Gray, and Sean McAndrew

The Social Skills Picture Book Teaching play, emotion, and communication to children with autism by Dr. Jed Baker

Comic Strip Conversations by Carol Gray