

Preparing for Change



Change is a part of everyday life, some changes can be really big, like moving house, and others quite small, like having a different breakfast cereal. However, both can be really difficult for children to deal with. Even changes that can be exciting, like going on holiday, can cause some children to worry or feel unsettled.



For some children they will openly talk about their worries but for other you might notice subtle changes to their behaviour; getting upset easily, being 'naughty' or just being very quiet.

Children with Autism can find change particularly challenging (especially when it is unexpected) which makes planning ahead and preparing for change even more essential.

So what can you do?

Be consistent

When dealing with change try and keep other things in your child's life as routine as you can e.g. bedtime, bath time etc. This reassures them that whatever else is changing, there are things that they can rely on to always happen to make them feel safe and in control.



Sometimes it can be tempting to treat your child to help 'make up for' difficult things that are happening. You might even excuse them from behaviour you wouldn't usually tolerate. However, this can actually lead to more anxiety as boundaries that are usually in place are missing.

Be calm

Not as easy as it sounds, especially if it is a big change for you too. However, if your child sees that you are staying calm it will help them to see there is nothing to worry about.



Be prepared

Preparation is key, find out as much information as you can about the change e.g. if starting in a new class, find out what the teachers name is and the school timetable.



Help them to know what to expect on the day e.g. If they're starting a new nursery you could practise the journey there and talk about what they will have for lunch etc.

Be open

Use clear language when describing the change; giving them time to process what you say with lots of pauses and breaks. The more you can prepare your child for the change that is happening, the easier it will be for them to deal with (don't be tempted to hide it till the last minute to 'save them the worry')

You also need to allow them time to ask questions and talk about their worries. Some ideas here include:

- Having **one-to-one calm time** with you planned into the day, this gives children the chance to talk over any worries about what is happening in a secure environment.
- Making a **worry book or box** where your child can write or draw their worries
- Draw a big **picture or mind map** together about the change, focusing on the good things e.g. going back to school means you get to see your friends and talk about Minecraft.



Be visual

Photos and pictures can be really useful for young children as they find information easier to process and retain when it is presented visually. There are lots of visual strategies that can help:

- **Social Stories:** short descriptions of a particular situation, event or activity, which include specific information about what to expect in that situation and why.
- A **book of photos**, or a **collage** on paper or a device (focusing on the positives) can help promote discussion and is something for them to look at whenever they want to before and/or during the change.
- **A visual timetable:** this is a series of pictures or symbols that explain what will happen and in which order on the day.
- **A calendar/ Visual schedule:** can help a child know when the change is happening (concepts such as time aren't easy to understand as they are very abstract, making them visual means they are more concrete). You can encourage your child to count down to the day.

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