

TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL

BOOK

I

» *Preparing your Child for High School*



AUTISM PROGRAMS
School Support Program



Autism Programs and Services
Toronto Catholic District School Board

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Introduction

Transitions require planning, preparation, and support. Some of the changes associated with entering high school will involve increased expectations and independence.

As parents you may need to develop a whole new set of activities, supports, and services that are in line with your child's strengths, interests, and postsecondary goals. Therefore, early planning and developing a pathway/vision for your child is crucial and will impact future goals.

A network of supports is necessary despite the transition point or pathway of interest. Supports can include family members, community agencies and/or government programs. Strong support can assist with your child's goals, interests and desires while preparing them to participate meaningfully in community life.

TCDSB offers the following services to help prepare for the transition to high school: inservice for teachers, parent workshop, transition visits, exchange of information meetings between elementary and high school and resources to assist the student with the transition.

About this Guide

This guide is among the many resources developed by the TCDSB, Autism Transition Team and the School Support Program, Surrey Place Centre to support successful transitions for students with ASD. It is one of two guides created for parents whose children will be entering grade nine and also for those that are planning the transition out of high school.

BOOK ONE contains tips and information to help parents and their children prepare for high school.

BOOK TWO focuses on topics related to the transition out of high school. It contains specific information for each of the following pathways; college/university, work, and community based services. Book two also has a section that focuses on topics related to additional planning considerations as children and parents age, such as financial and estate planning.

The appendix contains planning checklists to further assist with transition planning.

We hope that these guides will help you to:

- plan and prepare for entering high school,
- plan and prepare for graduating high school
- feel more prepared for your child's transition to adulthood

Transition Planning

Research shows a positive correlation between student involvement and future success. It would be very beneficial for students to be involved in their IEP and transition meetings.

INVOLVE YOUR CHILD IN THEIR TRANSITION PLANNING TO:

- promote school completion,
- provide opportunities to make important decisions about their life,
- promote attendance and success in postsecondary settings,
- encourage family involvement,
- teach lifelong skills such as goal setting, and
- encourage independence
- feel in control of their life while being an active participant.

TRANSITION PLANNING TIPS

The principles below are important for positive transition outcomes.

1. START EARLY

- Whether planning for secondary school or postsecondary options, the planning should start early.
- Feedback from parents indicates that planning for secondary school should start in grade 7.
- Postsecondary planning can start by age 14.
- Actions and activities that are planned early in secondary school can impact postsecondary activities.
- It's never too early to start planning!

2. CREATE A TRANSITION TEAM

- As much as possible, make your child a key player on the transition team and attend meetings.
- Multi-discipline support and teamwork among parents, school staff and any other member of a community agency is very important. For eg. family members, teachers, community caseworkers should all work together.
- Team members should have set responsibilities with timelines and goals.

3. USE A PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH

- It's best when your child can be an active participant in all decisions and activities.
- Transition planning should focus on individual strengths, abilities, interests and long-term goals for quality of life.

4. SET GOALS

- Set annual, measurable goals that are meaningful to your child's long-term success eg. my child will learn to prioritize homework and leisure with the use of an agenda.

5. COMMUNICATE AND WORK AS A TEAM

- As you know parents are key to communicate the needs, interests and strengths of their child – you do know them best!
- All team members, especially your child, will benefit from positive and open communication.
- Encourage your child to be involved in their transition planning.

HOW TO INVOLVE YOUR CHILD IN THEIR TRANSITION PLANNING:

- Invite them to attend meetings that discuss their IEP's,
- review the IEP with your child and discuss items that relate to transition planning,
- ask them if there are any items they want addressed,
- encourage and support them to prepare something to share at the meeting (examples of support include role playing, use of visuals, modeling),
- encourage and support them to develop attainable goals and action plans,
- take their strengths and interests into consideration.

Helpful Tips for Parents Managing Services

Transitions and accessing services can be overwhelming. These tips may help you to speed up the process, be more prepared, and lessen your stress.

KEEP A SERVICE FILE WITH ALL RELEVANT INFORMATION IN ONE PLACE

- Examples include binder, accordian file etc.
- Bring information with you whenever you are meeting with anyone about your child.
- Consider using dividers and labelling categories such as:
 - ▷ history (birth history, milestones, sleep patterns, behaviour logs, etc.),
 - ▷ assessments/reports,
 - ▷ medical,
 - ▷ financial,
 - ▷ school, and
 - ▷ other.

KEEP ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS

- Many agencies request copies of assessments and reports. It may be useful and quicker, to give a copy rather than having agencies request them from their original source.
- Make sure the date is on all reports.
- Make photocopies of all assessments, reports and recommendations.
- You may need to sign consents for professionals to share information amongst each other.

KEEP A LOG OF CONTACT INFORMATION AND AGENCIES YOU ARE INVOLVED WITH

- Include all correspondence (phone, email, face to face).
- Include who you spoke with, date and time and what you talked about.

WAIT LIST SUGGESTIONS

- Note the date the referral was made.
- Call occasionally to check the status.
- Contact the agency if something changes with your situation, such as a move, a stressful event, etc.

USING PRIVATE SERVICES (THIS MEANS YOU NEED TO PAY)

- Research your options, you can visit and interview staff to help you make your decision.
- Charitable foundations may support funding.
- Workplace benefits/insurance policies may also provide some coverage for private services.

WHEN APPLYING FOR SERVICES, INVESTIGATE THE FOLLOWING

- Does this service have an application deadline?
- Is there certain criteria needed to apply/enroll?
- Is a referral necessary? (i.e. doctor referral)

KEEP ANY RECEIPTS FOR ITEMS DIRECTLY RELATED TO YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

- You may be able to use receipts for certain grants, government funding options, taxes and insurance purposes.

Sometimes plans take longer than originally planned or take a different direction, and that's ok. It's important to know that there may be various ways to achieve goals. For instance, it may take six rather than four years to complete a high school diploma. Think about alternative ways goals can be achieved. If there's a plan that incorporates strengths, interests and abilities and includes the steps to get there then it may be achievable.

Preparing my Child for High School: Transition to High School

The transition to high school involves many changes. Your child will need to learn new skills such as using a locker, taking a bus, eating in the cafeteria, etc. In addition he/she will be adjusting to different teachers and dealing with more complex social situations. These activities require a wide range of social and organizational skills that are often a challenge for students.

This section is meant to provide some suggestions that may assist in preparing your child for high school so that they can better tolerate the changes that are to come.

Things to do Before September of Grade 9

- attend high school open house,
- find out the programs that the high school offers,
- attend TCDSB parent transition workshop,
- register your child at their local school,
- get information on summer school
- prepare your child for the upcoming changes
- consult grade 8 teacher about level of study.

Levels of Study in High School

In grade 8, a level of study needs to be selected for your child's grade 9 year. The level of study determines the courses they take for high school and it may also affect choices after they graduate. It is important that your child starts at a level that is best for them.

Talk to your child's and the grade 8 teacher

Questions to ask the grade 8 teacher:

- What level of study should my child be enrolled in that would be suitable for his/her learning style and where can he/she best be successful?
- Is my child on a modified program or is he/she working at grade level?
- What types of accommodations is he/she using and will they be the same?
- Is my child on an alternative program?

Once in high school, the possibility to change levels does exist. If this is something you need to explore then you can work with the course teachers and guidance counsellors to make a change.

The different levels of study in high school are Academic Courses, Applied Courses, Locally Developed Courses, Open Courses and K-coded Courses.

ACADEMIC COURSES “D”

- emphasis on theory and abstract thinking,
- students need to be working at a level 3 or 4 in grade 8, and
- student should be independent and a self motivated learner.

APPLIED COURSES “P”

- emphasis on practical and hands on applications,
- student should start to be an independent learner,
- students must be working at a level 1 or 2 in grade 8, and
- student requires teacher direction and instruction

LOCALLY DEVELOPED COURSES “L”

- emphasis will be on helping student to improve their skills,
- students are working at or below Level 1 in grade 8,
- students require a lot of teacher direction and instruction, and
- student is provided with additional resources and teacher support.

OPEN COURSES “O”

- these courses are open to students enrolled in any level.

K CODED-COURSES “K” (NON-CREDIT EARNING)

- students work on alternative curriculum
- emphasis is on life skills
- students are on modified/alternative programs

Developing Partnerships

Research has shown (Murray and Ryley, 2011) that “when parents and professionals partner with one another to meet the needs of individuals with ASD it can have a positive impact on the quality of their cognitive, social and emotional development.” This partnership can provide a foundation for student success.

BE INFORMED

- Speak to the principal and teachers to become familiar with school policies, procedures, curriculum, and programs.
- Talk with school staff regarding what social support programs may be available in their school.

BE CONNECTED

- Become involved in school activities such as grade 9 night, fundraisers, concerts, sports events, etc.

- Attend school council meetings to connect with other parents and stay connected with the school community.

ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

Positive communication will enable you to discuss concerns, solve problems, and share successes. As parents, you have valuable insight and knowledge that can be shared with the school. **Share information about your child's:**

- strengths & interests,
- challenges,
- stress signals and stress reduction strategies, and
- methods of communication.

Establishing a Method for Ongoing Feedback

DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION PLAN

Ask who the main contact for your child will be if issues arise. Share that you would like to be a part of your child's progress, in both academic and social situations. Plan how frequently you will be updated and how updates will occur.

PARTICIPATE IN SCHOOL MEETINGS

Some of the best meetings occur when there is open, respectful discussion that can lead to mutual goals. Do not hesitate to ask questions and state what is important to you. If a difference of opinion occurs, asking for more information, or offering more information may be helpful to make a decision that is in the best interest of your child.

BE OPEN TO TRYING NEW IDEAS

It's true that parents know their child best, however students may behave differently in their new environment. School staff may want to try new ways of helping your child. Sometimes it can be good to try a different approach.

Preparing for School Meetings

In most situations, before your child starts high school, joint meetings will take place between the elementary school and the high school. There may also be parent-teacher meetings once the school year has started. It is helpful to attend all meetings in order to provide input and monitor your child's progress.

BEFORE A MEETING	DURING A MEETING	AFTER A MEETING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Prepare notes so that you can cover all the topics that are important to you. If possible share that list with the teacher prior to the meeting to avoid any surprises. ▶ Ask if there are issues that the school staff would like to address so that you can also be prepared. ▶ Prepare your child for the meeting. Consider sharing the agenda and ideas with your child. ▶ Have your child actively participate in the meeting if they are able. This may include asking a question, discussing an interest, sharing a success and concern, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Keep communication positive. ▶ Listen to others. ▶ Ask for clarification. ▶ Provide feedback. ▶ Develop an action plan. ▶ Take notes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Follow up with the teacher, and your child. ▶ Ask for any prepared document of the meeting, if available. ▶ It's okay to ask for clarification related to the meeting or action plan, next steps etc. ▶ Monitor progress.

Becoming Familiar with the New School and Staff

Your child may have different teachers for each course or may be in a class with many new adult faces. Whatever the differences may be, your child, like all new students, may find it overwhelming to adjust to the new setting.

Tips

- Visit the school before September. You may even want to visit over the summer.
- With permission, take photographs of people and places in the school and

review them over the summer.

- Visit the school website because there may be resources that can be reviewed.
- Consider a summer school program at the new high school, if it is offered
- Review any transition material your child has been given.
- Review the structure of the day and what happens in between periods i.e. the sound of the bell and how busy the hallway is etc.
- Review morning drop-off and after school pick-up location and details.

Building Skills to Prepare your Child for High School

Preparing your child by working on skills relevant to high school may help ease the transition. It would be ideal to teach these skills before September of grade 9 so there is enough time to prioritize and practice.

When developing new skills, it can be helpful to begin by:

- showing your child the steps to be followed,
- guiding him/her through the steps,
- giving him/her a chance to complete the task on their own, and
- providing encouragement throughout the process.

Building your Child's Independence Skills

There is a greater expectation that your child will be as independent as possible in high school. Encouraging more independence at home and while in the community will lessen your child's stress and increase the likelihood of a successful transition to high school.

It would be helpful to:

- identify aspects of your child's school routines that require help,
- teach him/her to carry out tasks and routines as independently as possible, and
- provide your child with opportunities to become more familiar with high school-related tasks (such as, taking the bus or opening his lock).

INCREASE INDEPENDENCE IN THE FOLLOWING SELF-CARE SKILLS

- taking care of personal appearance,
- choosing appropriate clothing,
- brushing hair and teeth,
- using deodorant,
- dressing themselves, and
- toileting.

Getting to School

In the months before school starts, your child should;

- know whether he/she will be taking a school bus, TTC, or walking,
- review the route that he/she will be taking to school,
- have ample opportunities to practice the route.
- begin with supervision and slowly fade supports as necessary,
- be aware of personal safety procedures such as not talking with strangers, knowledge of community signs and what they mean

IF TAKING THE TTC, CONSIDER THE SET OF SKILLS THAT ARE NEEDED

- which bus to take,
- knowledge of fares and paying for a ride,
- watching for the designated stop,
- knowledge of alternate routes in case busses are out of service,
- ringing the bell,
- etiquette on the bus,
- safety,
- getting off the bus, and
- walking to the high school.

Establishing New Routines

There will be many new routines for your child to get used to in high school.

Before September you may not be familiar with exact procedures, however there are items that can be reviewed and/or practiced such as;

- *Morning routine*
 - ▷ Setting an alarm clock, getting up early, and arriving to school on time.
- *Reading a timetable*
 - ▷ Obtain a sample class schedule from the school and review it with your child. Review when he will have time to go to his locker and when he will have breaks and lunch.
- *Using a locker*
 - ▷ Practice opening and closing a locker, using a key lock, a combination lock or other type of lock.
- *Cafeteria skills*
 - ▷ Standing in a line, ordering food, carrying items on a tray, paying for food, and finding a place to sit. Going to a fast food restaurant would allow him/her to practice many of those skills. Role-playing at home is also a good way to practice many of the skills needed.

Enhancing your Child's Organizational Skills

Learning and maintaining organizational skills is important during the transition to high school because task demands are increased and there is an expectation to be more independent. Consider trying some things at home to help with organizational skills, such as:

- planning meals,
- packing for an outing,
- caring for personal belongings,
- organizing supplies,
- using a wallet,
- monitoring time, and
- identifying chores and setting a chore schedule.

Organizing Homework

Establishing homework routines throughout the school year and during the summer is an important part of preparing for the transition to high school. It is helpful to get your child into the habit of working at a specific time and in a specific place. Consider setting up activities in a place where you expect school work will be done. Activities can include reading, writing, crossword puzzles, building sets, or anything else your child enjoys. The main point is to establish a routine.

THE FOLLOWING MAY ASSIST WITH HOMEWORK ORGANIZATION:

- have all necessary supplies before your child starts working,
- highlight/underline key words or pictures in instructions or text,
- provide opportunities for movement during homework routines,
- set a timer to indicate upcoming breaks or when homework should be complete,
- end each homework session with a positive activity,
- learn to use a daily planner, and
- use a homework checklist (text or pictures, or both) with the following list for each subject.

SAMPLE HOMEWORK CHECKLIST * YOU CAN USE SOMETHING LIKE THIS TO INCREASE HOMEWORK INDEPENDENCE AT HOME.

- ✓ *I have checked my agenda for homework*

- ✓ *I have the materials I need to do my homework (pencil, pen, eraser, book, notes, handouts)*

- ✓ *I completed the assignment*

- ✓ *I checked the assignment to be sure it was correct*

- ✓ *There was no homework in this subject tonight*

Enhancing your Child's Communication and Social Skills

In high school, social demands become more complicated and the rules for acceptable behaviour become less clear. These new expectations may create frustration and stress for your child. For this reason, it is important for parents to continue building their child's social and communication skills.

You can help prepare your child by reviewing and practicing social situations that may arise. Strategies can include discussion, visual supports, or role playing to teach how to greet people in the hallways and how to ask questions in class etc. Unfamiliar social situations that arise will increase the demands for skills in problem solving, communication, and self-help. You can help your child better cope by practicing decision making, problem solving and self-advocacy.

Suggestions:

- encourage hobbies and recreational activities,
- investigate social skills groups in the community,
- investigate a peer buddy system at the school,
- encourage and expand the range of interests,
- encourage the development of friendship,
- assist your teen in planning outings with others,
- ask if the high school has a best buddies program or a peer mentor program,
- enhance problem solving and self-advocacy skills,
- discuss social boundaries and roles of friendships and,
- provide choices.

Helping your Child Manage Anxiety and Stress

Strategies to Manage Stress

Practice the strategies routinely while your child is calm so that they're better prepared to utilize them when they're feeling stressed or anxious. Provide positive feedback when you observe your child using the strategies.

Visuals can support the following stress reduction strategies:
taking deep, slow breaths,

- counting to 10,
- going to a quiet place,
- exercising, and
- using a yoga ball.

Supports and Resources for Parents

As parents, you can get support in the following ways:

- Connect with other parents of students with special needs who are already in the high school.
- Speak to school personnel, resource staff and service providers.
- Volunteer on your School Council.
- Become involved in parent support groups.
- Contact your Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC). The members of SEAC have a strong interest and commitment in assisting other parents who may have children with special needs or abilities. SEAC members are available to make presentations at school council meetings and/or other in-services for teachers and parents regarding the role of SEAC.
- Connect with community agencies, organizations and associations that provide support and counselling to families (for example, Surrey Place Centre, Aspergers Society of Ontario, Autism Society of Ontario, Geneva Centre and Toronto Association of Community Living).

Appendix

Grade 8 to Grade 9 Planning Checklist

HAVE YOU....
<input type="checkbox"/> Attended high school open houses?
<input type="checkbox"/> Know the high school application deadline?
<input type="checkbox"/> Selected courses and course levels?
<input type="checkbox"/> Attended TCDSB parent fair and visited the transition services booth?
<input type="checkbox"/> Attended the TCDSB transition to grade 9 parent workshop?
<input type="checkbox"/> Completed parent questionnaire for the transition to grade 9 service?
<input type="checkbox"/> Communicated any information that the high school should be aware of?
<input type="checkbox"/> Thought about if your child is working towards an OSSD, OSSC or COA?
<input type="checkbox"/> Visited the school with your child?
<input type="checkbox"/> Registered for summer school?
<input type="checkbox"/> Established routines?



God's Promise of Help and Healing

"Remove every obstacle from their path! Build the road and make it ready!"

Book of Isaiah (57.14)



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