Supporting Children with Social and Communication Differences

Top Tips for Supporting Your Child at Home

Managing Change and Transitions

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Managing Change

Preparing for Change

Children with social and communication differences have different styles of thinking. They may be very absorbed in their favourite activity or may not understand what it is you are saying, especially if they have speech and language difficulties or delay.

Change

For some children change can lead to disruptive and challenging behaviours and increased anxiety.

It is hard to adapt to change when it is not of your choosing and especially with unexpected change so being prepared for upset at times and helping with following strategies can help reduce the challenge.

1. Listen if the child gets upset and observe your child’s reactions.
2. Show them that you recognise their feelings and explain that you understand.
3. Help them to focus on upcoming enjoyable tasks, and provide reminders of the next time the preferred activity will be available.

For example, say, "I know it's hard to stop playing in the water, but next we get have a snack and then you can play with more water in the garden.

For children who struggle and like sensory objects, when finishing an activity offer a comfort toy or sensory distraction for them to hold to take to the next activity such as a small teddy, blanket or scented cloth. Some children like to hold small world figures (toys) in each hand to calm.

Transitions

Transitions happen throughout our day and can be minor changes between daily routines and play activities or larger such as leaving home to go to nursery on a nursery day, or leaving one place to visit another.

For children with social and communication differences the “size” or significance of an unexpected or change in transition does not generally match
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the level of reaction of the challenging behaviour or upset that you may experience from your child. This can lead to anxiety for both parties when planning for change as you want to support your child to move through their routine in a positive way.

For consistently difficult transitions, consider showing your child what is next by using another activity of equal value.

Such as when the TV has finished, time for bubbles

Strategies for Transition:

Timers, Clocks, Visual Numbers:

Give your child reminders that the activity is coming to an end, you can use timers on your phone, or clocks or sand timers. Use Five, three, and one-minute reminders that the activity is going to end and then count on your fingers “5 4 3 2 1,” TV is finished and time for dinner “. Point to numbers on a picture such as 10 elephants or 10 cars (depending on your child’s interests.)
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Time for Countdown

5 more minutes

4 more minutes

3 more minutes

2 more minutes

1 more minute

finished
Countdown

10  Ten
9   nine
8   eight
7   seven
6   six

5   five
4   four
3   three
2   two
1   one
For children who do not understand concept of numbers or time you can use

**Colours**

**Colour Codes such as the Traffic Light System**

- Hold up a green card to show the start of an activity, get your child to look and if possible touch the green card and say ......is starting

- This yellow card is the warning card; ......nearly finished.

- This red card means that the activity is finished. Hold the card so that the child can see it in their eye-line, take your child’s hand to touch the card and say ......has finished.

If you show the red card and say finished, it is **important to follow through** what you say so that your child starts to understand and manage change and transition and you are giving a consistent message.

The traffic light system can be used through-out the day such as dinner ready (**green**), TV finished (**red**).

You can also use the yellow card for delaying a start as well as preparing for finish. So Yellow can mean **Waiting/ Wait**, as in waiting for a turn.
Your child will need to use all their mental energy to come off task, shift their attention, work out what is happening next and follow something that may not be of their choosing.

Being calm, and limiting your language to name, activity and action such as “Lucy, water-play finished, time for snack” can help to prevent emotional overload.

**A child with social and communication differences can be supported to prepare their thinking for what is coming up next, and the visual prompts and consistent simple language acts as a reminder to help make that transition.**

**Now and Next Boards**

A **now and next board** helps children see what is expected now and what will happen once this has finished.

This is a good idea if you are trying an activity first that you want to do and you can add something that your child really likes as next as a **motivator** or a **“positive re-inforcer”**

For example, **now** drink and **next** football.

Or you can use **First** drink and **then** football.

IF you don’t have pictures/printer you can use a white board with dry wipe pens that can be bought from supermarkets or good old pen and paper.
These are great for showing what is happening and also when something is finished and what is to come. Particularly if your little one wants a lot of TV time or IPAD time then you can show what is next and perhaps something of equal value so that finishing isn’t too stressful.

With repetition and regular use, children soon get the hang of this and finishing and moving will be easier.

Remember:

DO give the 2nd activity straight away to reinforce the now and next, over time this helps children predict what is happening, help them attach meaning to the pictures and words and start to follow adult direction.

Try not to change your options, be predictable and reduce your speaking to give your child time to accept change, a smiling face and patience will help your child come off task and move on to the next activity.
Using a Visual Schedule

If your child likes visual schedules you can structure their day with key activities and build when your child is ready.

Such as Breakfast, “Play activity “, snack, toilet, garden, TV, messy play dinner