







## Back-to-School Tips to support autistic and neurodivergent students

### General Tips:

- ✓ Be proactive in helping your child prepare for going back to school
- ✓ Be a role model; it is acceptable to share your feelings (excitement, overwhelm, worry, etc.)
- ✓ Anticipate that the schedule for the first week or two of school may look different as everyone gets into the back-to-school routine, bus routes are worked through, etc.
- ✓ As a parent or caregiver, try to relax and plan some self-care for yourself. Taking care of you will help you to be best equipped to support your child. Enlist help from your support system whenever possible!

	Why might this be challenging?	Strategies and Supports
 Anticipating return to school	Some individuals may find waiting to be stressful and may be highly focused on when they will return to school	Share specific information about returning to school. Who is their teacher/are they new or familiar? How will they get to school? What activities and classes will they have? What will they do during recess or study hall? Consider using a visual support (social narrative, written information, photos, etc.). Cross off days on a calendar to show how many remain until school begins. To reduce stress, identify a limit of how many questions and conversations about school can occur each day.
 Changes to routine	Things that are new or unfamiliar, or changes to usual routines may cause unease, worry, or distress. Moving from a summer schedule to a school schedule can be a drastic change.	Start to introduce elements of the back-to-school routine ahead of time. Gradually move to wake up and bedtimes that are closer to how this would look during the school year. Encourage regular mealtimes and hygiene routines. Practice and reinforce following new or returning routines. Consider using visual supports or checklists for these routines.
 Supplies and materials	Keeping track of school supplies, books, and materials may be overwhelming.  Some individuals may also have a need for sensory items and/or communication devices/materials (i.e., PECs)	Make buying needed supplies a fun activity! Spend time together going back-to-school shopping for clothing and supplies. Consider any sensory sensitivities your child may have and send them with items to support their needs at school such as sensory fidget items, headphones, etc. If the individual uses an alternative means of communication, plan for transporting devices and chargers from home to school. Identify who is responsible for programming new vocabulary on the device (i.e., teachers' names, school buildings, etc.). Organization may present a challenge especially if your child studies multiple subjects or moves between classes throughout the day. Help your child establish a system for organization, such as color coding or labeling, and think about items that may assist with organization (i.e., checklists, planners, seat back organizers, etc.). Help your child label personal items they may be bringing to school with them.

	<b>Why might this be challenging?</b>	<b>Strategies and Supports</b>
 <p>School rules and/or expectations</p>	<p>Understanding and following new rules may be difficult, and individuals may benefit from clear and explicitly outlined expectations.</p>	<p>When possible, communicate with your child's school to learn their school schedule and any specific expectations. Review and practice these with your child prior to their return to school.</p> <p>Create a social narrative or other visual examples that outline school expectations. Review these in advance of their return to school and practice and reinforce these with your child.</p>
 <p>New experiences</p>	<p>Students may encounter new teachers, school buildings, peers, bus drivers, etc., when they return to school. Classes and learning might look different from year to year. This may lead to unease and worry.</p>	<p>If your child will be attending a new school/building, consider asking to visit the school with your child. Visit the main office, bathrooms, cafeteria, gym, library, playground, or any other rooms they may spend time in during the coming year.</p> <p>Anticipate and role play some scenarios that may arise where your child needs to use their problem-solving skills. For example, what could they do if they forget to bring their lunch or if they need help with an assignment.</p> <p>Transitioning away from something familiar or that you enjoy may be difficult. Talk with your child about what they may like about school, friends they will see again, activities they enjoy, etc. Help them become excited to go back to school!</p> <p>Remind your child about their schedule and when they will come home each day, include any weekend activities they look forward to.</p>
 <p>Sharing information with teachers</p>	<p>Parents, caregivers, the school team, and transportation team are all integral players in your child's learning and growth. Establishing communication prior to the start of/early in the school year can lead to a successful year for your child.</p>	<p>Consider sharing brief information about your child's unique strengths and needs, likes and dislikes, what makes them feel safe, and other information that is important to know on the first day.</p> <p>Foster a collaborative relationship through open and productive dialogue with the school team. Determine preferred means of communication with team members early in the school year.</p>

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