
Transitions

Considerations

Returning to school after extended breaks is often stressful for children and adolescents. More attention may need to be given to transitioning back to school this year due to COVID-19, phased reopenings, and hybrid learning arrangements. Families play an important role in helping children and adolescents transition back to school. It is important to consider the individuals involved (e.g., student, teacher, paraprofessional), the multiple environments encountered (e.g., classroom, gymnasium; virtual environment) and the array of tasks and activities performed (e.g., learning, playing) when thinking about transitions. Below are some tips for families when helping children and adolescents transition back to school.

Student Supports

- [Talk to students about fears, anxieties, and stressors related to starting a new school year.](#)
- Provide opportunities (e.g., virtual or in-person tours) for students to preview the school environment and their new school schedule.
- Plan introductory meetings to share information about students with teachers and related service providers.
- Work with school personnel to monitor and address concerns or changes in mental, physical, or behavioral health.
- [Collaborate with school personnel](#) to document changes in service needs in individualized education plans (IEPs) and 504 plans.
- Explore different [resources and technologies](#) to provide special education services in the virtual environment.
- Explain school rules and classroom expectations using [social stories](#), videos, and other visual supports.
- Provide opportunities to meet classmates prior to the first day of school and throughout the year, either virtually or while following distancing guidelines.
- Check in with students at the end of each school day. Debrief, and address questions, concerns, and feelings related to returning to school.

Environmental Supports

- Ensure the learning environment provides a [sense of safety and security](#).
- Offer [alternative seating options](#) to meet students' specific needs and ease the transition back into the classroom or during virtual learning.
- Review and provide visual aides directing movement between school environments such as posting one-way signs, taping paths on the floor, and providing aides to monitor social distancing while standing in lines.
- Use [visual timers and countdown clocks](#) to help transition students from one activity to the next.
- Encourage participation in [virtual classroom environments](#) that promote student interaction and engagement.
- Create a [work area and a break area](#) when engaged in distance learning at home.

Activity and Task Support

- Develop [schedules](#) to support transitions from home to school each day or to virtual learning environments.
- Incorporate breaks and quiet moments (e.g., simply sitting still after awakening, meditation, mindfulness) into the time before starting activities and throughout the day.

- Consider [visual schedules and checklists](#) to guide the completion of activities for younger learners and those with intellectual disabilities.
- Utilize transitional objects (i.e., those that provide comfort and a sense of security) or representational objects (i.e., those that evoke the upcoming activity, such as a paint brush to indicate art class) during transitions to school or between classroom activities and school environments.
- Schedule meals, snacks, bathroom breaks, and downtime during virtual learning.
- Provide opportunities for peer interaction during lunchtime and [recess](#) that support social distancing (e.g., mindful walks, [online games](#), virtual meetups).
- Establish routines during distance learning that cue the [start and end of the school day](#).

Resources

- AOTA—[Successful Participation at School: Strategies for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders](#)
- AOTA—[Transitions for Children and Youth: How Occupational Therapy Can Help](#)
- Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules—[Supporting Individuals With Autism Through Uncertain Times](#) (includes translated materials in 10 different languages)
- Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI)—[Support for Families During the COVID-19 Crisis](#)