



Tips for smoother transitions back to school after a break

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Marie is an eleven year old who loves playing piano, listening to music, painting and learning about mammals. While at school she spends time learning with her classmates in their common learning environment and also completes individualized programming throughout her school. She is currently learning to use PECS more consistently to communicate her needs and wants and has been learning to stretch and use a stationary bike to manage her anxiety. Like her peers, Marie has challenges transitioning back to school after a break, however she requires some additional supports to help her have success. Marie's teaching team wants to provide the best learning opportunities for Marie and would like her return to the school routine after the spring break to go as smoothly as possible. Here are some of the things Marie's team does to help her.

Note: This document does not constitute clinical advice, but rather serves as an example of an effective practice for a particular student. Intervention plans should be based upon assessment, and evidence-based teaching strategies should be carefully selected according to the child's needs, and learning profile.

Preparation and Organization. The teaching team reviews all documents that outline Marie's supports and learning plans. The materials needed for lessons, strategies and supports are prepared, organized, and easily accessible.

Consistency. Strategies and supports in place before the break are utilized when the learner returns to school. A visual schedule is key to helping Marie navigate her day and understand what is coming up next. She also uses a visual timer to help her know how long she will be doing an activity.

Review school rules and expectations. Time is spent with Marie reading the social stories and watching the videos that have been created for her to understand the expectations for the activity and situation.

Spend time completing previously learned skills and mastered tasks. During the first couple of days back after a break, the teaching team takes the opportunity to review previously mastered learning targets and lessons. Sometimes learners coming back from a break can forget some steps of tasks or need to review skills before moving on to new ones. Marie benefits from this review time because she enjoys familiar activities, it provides her with opportunities to feel confident, and helps the teaching staff assess her skills to set her up for success.

Schedule preferred activities. Marie is expected to spend time doing her school work, however the teaching team decreases the amount of lesson time slightly and provides frequent breaks that include opportunities for her to do some of her preferred tasks and activities.

Catch her being good! The team reinforces the behaviours that want to see Marie do more often. This is something Marie's team focuses on day-to-day, however it is even more important when she is coming back after a break. The team has some of her favourite activities and items ready to provide to her for appropriate walking into school, after a task has been completed, and for using her PECS to communicate what she wants and needs.

Reflect. The team takes time to evaluate the supports put in place for Marie's transition back to school. They look at what lessons were accomplished during the first couple of days back, behaviour data, and overall progress. Everything does not always go as planned and sometimes support and strategies do not work the way we expected. When something does not go as planned, Marie's team thinks about what would have helped or could have been done differently. This reflection and evaluation are key for future transitions.

Celebrate & Communicate. Celebrate all improvements (big and small). Marie's teacher communicates some of the positive aspects of her day to her family. They may share the list of tasks she was able to complete during the day with little to no prompting, about her request for gum using her PECS, that she enjoyed using her stationary bike for 3 minutes and that she loved eating lunch with her lunch buddies. Marie's teaching team also has a place where they write about Marie's accomplishments and new interests in their team note book. This notebook helps the team communicate in between team meetings.

About Us

Autism Learning Partnership (ALP), a branch of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) in New Brunswick (Canada), is the sole provider of the Provincial Autism Training curriculum for preschool autism agencies and educational personnel in New Brunswick. The Autism Learning Partnership provides bilingual, evidence-based, high-quality professional learning and resources to support families, preschool agency personnel and educational personnel in the province, and has a mandate to establish partnerships with organizations nationally and internationally.