



## Off to School – Starting School on the Right Foot (Part 3)

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In the last couple of weeks of Friday tips, we have shared some of our experiences in facilitating transition meetings for families whose children with autism are beginning school (see [www.autism-learning-partnership.com](http://www.autism-learning-partnership.com) for Parts 1 and 2). This week, let's dive into some of the key questions the school team will need to develop a transition plan for the child. While this series is devoted towards helping learners with autism transition into school, these strategies may also be helpful for all children who require transition planning.

**Note:** This document does not constitute clinical advice. Transition planning must consider factors such as established processes and policies, resources, unique family situations, and the child's needs.

**Note:** The New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development collaborated with the other Atlantic Provinces as part of our collaboration with APSEA Autism in Education in developing an information paper on this topic ([click here for full article](#)).

### Getting a Clear Picture of the Child's Profile and Current Supports

While you want to open the door for the family and service providers to share a full picture of their child's functioning, it is helpful to structure the conversation with some guiding questions (example: *In order for us to get to know Billy, I'd like for you to share with us some of his strengths, and challenges, in key areas. Let's start with communication. Can you share how Billy communicates with others around him, and how you communicate with him?*).

The following are sample questions for each of these domains. These open-ended questions are meant to serve to assist you in obtaining a comprehensive picture of a child's needs, and to help structure the conversation, if needed.

#### *Strengths and challenges*

o Communication:

*How does (name) communicate with others?*

*How does (name) make their needs known?*

*How would you describe (name's) language skills?*

o Social interaction:

*Tell me about how (name) interacts with other children, and other adults.*

*What are some "do's" and "don'ts" when interacting with (name)?*

o Self-help:

*What are some things that (name) can do independently as part of the everyday routine?*

*What does (name) usually need help with?*

*Inquire about feeding, dressing, and toileting.*

o Safety:

*Is there anything we should know about to ensure (name's) safety at school?*

o Behaviour:

*What are situations in which (name) copes best? Are there any situations where (name) typically has behavioural challenges?*

*If there are concerns: How often does this happen? What does it look like? How intense does this behaviour get? How do people typically respond?*

o Interests, preferred and non-preferred activities, and possible reinforcers:

*What are some of (name's) main likes and dislikes?*

*Medical and/or dietary concerns:* Invite the family to share any medical or dietary concerns their child experiences, and how that might impact their daily functioning. Inquire as to the types of supports that are currently needed to address these concerns.

*Current preschool services:*

Inquire regarding current placement (e.g. home, daycare, etc.) and preschool services.

*Current programming*

o Program goals and summary

*What are some of the goals that you are currently working on with (name)?*

o Effective teaching strategies

*What have you found to work best with (name) when you are teaching him new skills?*

*What have you found to be ineffective?*

o Communication method and any required communication supports

*Is there anything else we should know about (name's) communication, or any supports that will be needed at school?*

o Visual supports

*Do you use visual supports? What types and in what situations?*

*How does (name) respond to visual supports?*

*What, if any, visual supports do you expect (name) will need when beginning school?*

o Environmental supports

*What types of accommodations are made to help (name) be successful at home/daycare?*

*What are some of the preventative strategies you use?*

o Social supports

*What supports are needed for (name) to encourage positive interactions with peers or new adults?*

Next Friday, in the last part of this 4 part series on school transition, we will discuss the meeting wrap-up and some other key issues to consider for a successful meeting.

## 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.

## Appendix A

### Transition to School Sharing and Planning Meeting – Sample Agenda

- Welcome & Introductions
  - Welcome the participants
  - Acknowledge the parents/guardians' anxiety
- Purpose and format of meeting
- Documentation of diagnosis and any additional written information
- Medical and/or dietary concerns
- Strengths and challenges
  - Communication
  - Social interaction
  - Self-help
  - Safety
  - Behaviour
- Medical and/or dietary concerns
- Current preschool services
- Current programming
  - Program goals and summary
  - Effective teaching strategies
  - Communication method and any required communication supports
  - Visual supports
  - Environmental supports
  - Social supports
- Environmental sensitivities
- Behaviour support plan
- Transportation considerations
- Method of communication between home and school
- Any additional parent/guardian concerns
- Transition and orientation activities
- Next meeting date or follow-up plan
- Closing and thank you