Coping with Change

As parents and teachers know, routine is very important to children who have an ASD. Even small routines can need to be adhered to by some children but at a time when major changes are happening some children will require us to be vigilant to detect any signs of anxiety to ensure a child's well -being.

Look out for signs of the following as they are often signs of anxiety.

1. Avoidance of new things.

2. Withdrawing from social situations.

3. Preference for routines/rules.

4. Insisting on sameness.

5. Narrow focus of interests and attention.

6. Becoming easily agitated.

 7. Irritability.

8. Increase in repetitive behaviours.

9. Developing safe escape routes.

When we are aware that a change is about to happen is important that we prepare the child for this change, if possible. This might include giving the child age appropriate information about what will take place instead of the usual arrangements and encouraging the child that someone will be available if help is needed. Visual information will always support just telling a child new information.

Ideas to Support Change

Write down what the new arrangements are.

Use a **Social Story** to explain to the child what the change involves, who will be there to help, how long it might last etc. You can find out more about Social Stories on the National Autistic Society's website.

www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx

Show a structure to the planned day by using a schedule.

Pictures can be used to show a sequence of events for younger children.

A useful resource for pictures is www.twinkl.co.uk

Write the sequence of events into a schedule. The child can tick off events as they happen if this helps understanding.

Let the child express their concerns or worries.

Talk to the child and allow them to **write any concerns or draw a picture** about their concerns and put it into a **worry bag** or **box.** This will allow you to address the concern at an appropriate time and perhaps prepare an answer.

Emotions Thermometers

Any **EMOTIONS THERMOMETER** made for a child must be individualised to the needs of that child. For example, use words to describe feelings that the child understands. A typical thermometer is based on a graded colour scale.
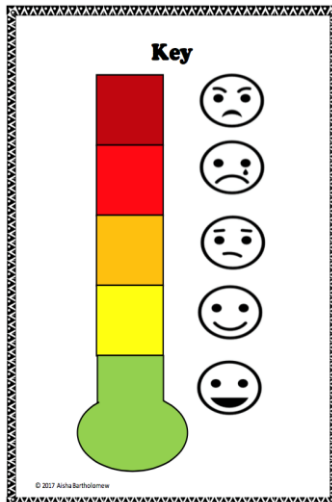
This thermometer shows 5 levels of emotions and is based on the 5 Point Scale.

www.5pointscale.com

Words can be added to show each emotion eg green is calm and red is stressed. This is a helpful way of allowing a child to learn about their own emotions, gauge their own emotions and then be able to express their emotions.

Warning about Changes

Even a short warning that a change is going to happen is better than no warning at all. Preparation for change is very helpful. For small changes, a simple countdown with either a **visual reminder**, or with a **timer** can be helpful.
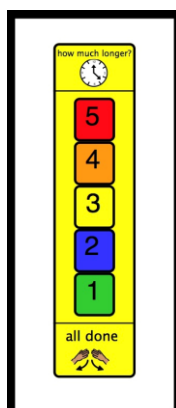
A **calendar** is a useful way of providing a warning that a change will happen. The child can then count down to a change in days.

For planned changes it can be useful to effectively use this **countdown** on the days leading up to when a change will be happening and showing the child when the change will take place.

Transition toy/book

These can be useful tools to use when there is a **period of waiting** or a **transition period.** This simply means containing access to a **motivating activity, book or toy** to a time when the child needs a **positive distraction.**

Celebrate Success

Use a book to celebrate successes and achievements. Let the child write and draw about things that have gone well or effort has been shown.