**Transitioning between activities**

**Overview**

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202133437-Picture1_large.jpg)

All individuals must change from one activity to another and from one setting to another throughout the day. At home, school, or in the workplace, transitions naturally occur frequently, requiring individuals to stop an activity, move from one location to another, and begin something new. Individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) may have greater difficulty than others in shifting attention from one task to another or in changes of routine. This may be due to a greater need for predictability (Flannery & Horner,1994), challenges in understanding what activity will be coming next (Mesibov, Shea, & Schopler, 2005), or difficulty when a pattern of behavior is disrupted.

A number of supports to assist individuals with ASD during transitions have been explored in the research and will be reviewed in this module. These transition strategies are designed to prepare individuals with ASD before the transition will occur and to support the individual during the transition.

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202478185-Picture2_large.jpg)

When transition strategies are used, individuals with ASD:

* Reduce the amount of transition time
* Increase appropriate behavior during transitions
* Rely less on adult prompting
* Participate successfully in school and community outings

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202478305-Picture3_large.jpg)

This module will define transition strategies, discuss how they might be used across settings, and provide specific examples that can be used as models for parents and professionals as they work with individuals with ASD.

**Pre-Assessment**

Top of Form

Pre-Assessment

It is best to try to avoid transitions when working with individuals with ASD.

Select an answer for question 99

Using a loud timer to signal when to move from one activity to another is the best way to transition students with ASD.

Select an answer for question 101

Transition strategies can be used:

Select an answer for question 102

Difficulty transitioning may be a component of the diagnostic criteria for autism.

Select an answer for question 103

Transition strategies should only be implemented by psychologists or behavior analysts.

Select an answer for question 104

Video priming is effective transition strategy if:

Select an answer for question 105

Transition strategies can occur after the transition has taken place.

Select an answer for question 106

Transition strategies should be used only for big transitions, such as moving from one setting to another (e.g., going from classroom to field trip location or from home to work setting).

Select an answer for question 107

What types of situations would require the use of transition supports?

Select an answer for question 108

Transitions strategies should be used for the first transition and then quickly faded.

Select an answer for question 109

Bottom of Form

**What are Transition Strategies?**

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Transition strategies are techniques used to support individuals with ASD during changes in or disruptions to activities, settings, or routines. The techniques can be used before a transition occurs, during a transition, and/or after a transition, and can be presented verbally, auditorily, or visually. The strategies attempt to increase predictability for individuals on the autism spectrum and to create positive routines around transitions. Transition strategies may include, but are not limited to, visual supports, timers, bells, video priming, SocialStoriesTM, and high probability requests. They are utilized across settings to support individuals with ASD.

**Why Do We Use Transition Strategies?**

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202481294-Picture25_large.jpg)

Transitions are a large part of any school or work day, as we move to different activities or locations. Studies have indicated that up to 25% of a school day may be spent engaged in transition activities, such as moving from classroom to classroom, coming in from the playground, going to the cafeteria, putting personal items in designated locations like lockers or cubbies, and gathering needed materials to start working (Sainato, Strain, Lefebvre, & Rapp, 1987). Similar requirements for transitions are found in employment and home settings as we move from one task to another, attend functions, and join others for meals and activities.

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202479078-Picture4_large.jpg)

Some individuals with ASD have difficulties associated with changes in routine or changes in environments and have a need for "sameness" and predictability (Mesibov et al., 2005). These difficulties may eventually hamper independence and limit an individual's ability to succeed in community settings.

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202480749-Picture21_large.jpg)

A variety of factors related to ASD may contribute to these difficulties during transitions. These may include problems in understanding the verbal directives or explanations that a teacher, parent, or employer is providing. When a teacher announces that an activity is finished and provides multi-step directions related to upcoming activities, students with ASD may not comprehend all of the verbal information. Difficulty sequencing information and recognizing relationships between steps of an activity can impact one's ability to transition as well. Individuals also may not recognize the subtle cues leading up to a transition (e.g., students packing up their materials, teachers wrapping up their lecture, co-workers getting their lunches out of the refrigerator) and, therefore, may not be prepared when it is time to move. Additionally, individuals with ASD are more likely to have restrictive patterns of behaviors (per the diagnostic criteria) that are hard to disrupt, thus creating difficulty at times of transitions. Finally, individuals with ASD may have greater anxiety levels which can impact behavior during times of unpredictability, as some transitions are.

In addition, other factors, not unique to individuals with ASD, may impact transition behavior. The ongoing activity may be more reinforcing to the individual than the activity he/she is moving to, or the second activity may be more demanding or unattractive to the individual (Sterling-Turner & Jordan, 2007). The individual may not want to start one activity or may not want to end another. In addition, the attention an individual receives during the transition process may be reinforcing or maintaining the difficult behavior.

**What are the Specific Transition Strategies and how do I implement them?**

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The transition strategies highlighted in this module are categorized based on the primary modality in which the cue is given-visual supports or auditory supports. Strategies will be further identified as those that may be used before a transition, during a transition, or after a transition. Several transition strategies include both auditory and visual components and may be used at different points throughout the transition process. This will be pointed out throughout the module. Please note that a number of the strategies are explained in depth in the Visual Supports module. It is recommended that readers reference that module for further information on several strategies.

**Visual Strategies**

Individuals with ASD learn in a variety of different ways, but research has shown that they demonstrate strength in visual learning. When individuals with ASD are given the opportunity to learn with visual supports or cues they:

* Complete more tasks by themselves therefore increasing their independence
* Learn more rapidly
* Demonstrate decreased levels of frustration, anxiety, and aggression related to task completion
* Adjust more readily to changes in their environments (Savner & Myles, 2000).

This section of the module will address visual strategies that can be used to support transitioning within and between environments.

# Before a Transition: Priming Strategies

Priming is a procedure that allows individuals to preview an activity or event before it occurs so that it becomes more predictable. Priming has been successful in teaching students academic and social skills, as well as in decreasing off-task and other problem behavior (Wilde, Koegel, & Koegel, 1992). Research has also shown that priming is effective in helping individuals on the autism spectrum during times of transition. Prior to a transition to a new location or novel activity, it may be helpful to prepare the individual for what to expect. There are several research-based ways that an individual can be primed for an upcoming transition.

# Before a Transition: Priming through Video

Videotaped instruction has proven effective in teaching new skills to students with autism and recently has been used to prepare individuals for upcoming transitions (Schreibman, Whalen, & Stahmer, 2000). Research using video priming was conducted with several boys with ASD who demonstrated challenging behavior when transitioning to new community settings with their families (i.e., Target store, Wal-Mart, Rite-Aid). The families videotaped several walking routes throughout the store (through the jewelry department, the toiletries section, toy department, ending at the cash register) and showed the videos to their children over several days. After the viewings, disruptive behavior decreased greatly as the transitions were made more predictable (Schreibman et al., 2000).

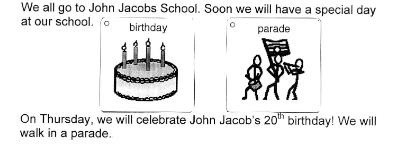
[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202479078-Picture4_large.jpg)

If watching videos is a preferred activity for an individual, video priming may be an effective strategy in preparing for a transition. First, the team working with the individual should identify the transitions that may be causing anxiety or confusion. This may include transitioning to a new classroom on campus, going to a new location in the neighborhood, attending a football game for the first time, or moving from one's office to the new conference room for a meeting. Next, the team should go to the location with a video camera. Walk through the steps that will be required during the transition (e.g., taking off the coat, hanging up the backpack, finding the appropriate desk) while taping and provide a simple narration about the process and requirements. Researchers recommend that tape length range from 1-4 minutes (Schreibman et al., 2000). After completing the tape, view it with the individual several times over several days prior to the identified transition.

## Case Study: Mrs. Bond's Trip to the Zoo

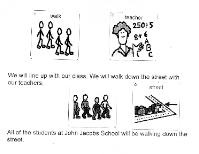
Before a field trip to the zoo with her elementary school students with ASD, Mrs. Bonds was nervous about how they would do with so many transitions. They would have to leave their classroom, board a new bus, exit the bus, enter the zoo, and transition frequently from exhibit to exhibit. The students would have to transition to new bathrooms and eat lunch in a new location. The number of transitions was so daunting that Mrs. Bonds almost considered cancelling. Instead, she decided to use video priming to help her students prior to the trip. Her goal was to make the transitions to the new location and during the new activity feel more predictable.Mrs. Bonds went to the zoo a week before the scheduled trip. She videotaped a number of the exhibits and provided narration about what would be expected while at the zoo. She played the short tape for her students three times before their trip. Then she was pleasantly surprised at how well her students did on the trip and how much they seemed to enjoy the new experiences, despite all the transitions. She even heard several of her students quoting the video as they moved from one activity to the next. Mrs. Bonds has decided that she will continue to use video priming to prepare her students before transitioning to novel locations or unique activities. She has already made tapes for the fire drill transitions, the transition to the cafeteria, and the transition to the next field trip, the public library.

# Before a Transition: Priming through Print

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Individuals may also be prepared for transitions to novel events through the use of written stories. These stories, sometimes called Social Stories, present concepts and situations in a visual format that may increase understanding for individuals with ASD (Gray, 2000). They are a method for explaining what is happening and what is expected across environmental settings. More information about how to write a Social Story can be found in the Social Narratives module or on Carol Gray's website: www.thegraycenter.org. Recent research (Ivey, Heflin, & Alberto, 2004) supports the use of Social Stories in preparing for transitions to novel events. Social Stories were read regularly to three young students with ASD as they prepared for several field trips to community locations. After reading the stories for 3-5 days before the introduction of the new setting (attending a birthday party, going to a local pond, and visiting a gift shop), an increase in student participation and a decrease in challenging behavior were noted.   
First the team working with an individual should determine if he/she would respond well to priming through print. If so, the team should next identify the transition that may be difficult, as well as assess the student's comprehension level so the story is written appropriately. The story should briefly describe the upcoming transition and the activities that will occur. The story may include photographs or illustrations to assist the student in comprehending the information. Team members should read the story to and/or with the individual consistently over a period of days. Providing a copy for use at all pertinent locations (e.g., home, school, work) is helpful as well.

## Case Study: Class Parade

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202479417-Picture6_large.jpg)

Ms. Harvey's class was asked to participate in a school-wide parade around the neighborhood to celebrate the school's 20th birthday. She knew that most of her 30 students would love the parade (any excuse to get out of class!) but she worried about Peter, her student with Asperger Syndrome. How would he handle the transitions to and during this new activity? How would he cope with the change in routine? He liked things to be predictable and could get pretty upset if there were big changes. Ms. Harvey thought about how anxious he seemed to get when the class attended the large assembly in the gym.

Ms. Harvey decided to consult with the special education teacher on campus, who suggested she write a story about the parade for Peter to read several days prior to the activity. The special education teacher suggested that Ms. Harvey include information about the transitions to the activity, what transitions would occur during the activity, and how Peter would transition back to the classroom when the parade was finished. Ms. Harvey thought that was a great idea since Peter liked books so much, and she decided to include some photos of Peter in the story too-all of her students enjoyed seeing themselves reflected in the class activities. She typed up the book and read it with Peter during library time several days before the parade. She reviewed it with him for the days leading up to the parade and sent a copy home so he could read it with his family too. On parade day, Peter was ready! To be "extra" prepared, Ms. Harvey carried a copy of the story with her so it could be quickly reviewed. Peter made it through all the transitions with no difficulty. Ms. Harvey decided to use the priming through print strategy for upcoming transitions-especially future assemblies.

An excerpt of Ms. Harvey's priming story for the school-wide parade is shown.

# Before a Transition: Preparation Strategies

Cueing individuals with ASD before a transition is going to take place is also a beneficial strategy. In many settings a simple verbal cue is used to signal an upcoming transition (e.g., "Time for a bath now," "Put your math away," or "Come to the break room for birthday cake"). This may not be the most effective way to signal a transition to individuals with ASD, as they may not be able to quickly process and understand verbal information. In addition, providing the cue just before the transition is to occur may not be enough time for an individual with ASD to shift attention from one task to the next. Allowing time for the individual with ASD to prepare for the transitions and providing more salient cues that individuals can refer to as they are getting ready to transition may be more effective. Several visual strategies used to support individuals with ASD in preparation for a transition have been researched and will be discussed.

# Before a Transition: Visual Timer

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It may be helpful for individuals with ASD to "see" how much time remains in an activity before they will be expected to transition to a new location or event. Concepts related to time are fairly abstract (e.g., "You have a few minutes"), often cannot be interpreted literally (e.g., "Just a second" or "We need to go in a minute"), and may be confusing especially if time-telling is not a mastered skill.

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202479587-picture8_large.jpg)

Presenting information related to time visually can assist in making the concepts more meaningful. Research indicates that the use of a visual timer (such as the Time Timerpictured below and available at timetimer.com) helped a student with autism transition successfully from computer time to work time at several points throughout the day (Dettmer, Simpson, Myles, & Ganz, 2000). This timer displays a section of red indicating the allotted time. The red section disappears as the allotted time runs out.

## Case Study: Karl and his homework

Getting his 12-year-old son with autism to finish his homework was a nightly chore for Paul. Karl would rather play on the computer or read comic books. Getting him to transition from those activities to his homework was very difficult. Paul tried to tell Karl that his homework would only take a "little while," but he didn't think Karl really understood how long that was. He also tried telling Karl that he could only have "a few more minutes" on the computer, but that didn't seem to be meaningful either.

Paul decided to try using a visual timer. He put the timer in Karl's view as Karl played on the computer. He set the timer for 15 minutes and told Karl "when the red is gone it will be time to work on your homework." Periodically Paul would remind Karl of the upcoming transition by drawing his attention to the amount of red that was left on the timer. When the red was gone, Paul helped Karl turn off the computer (under protest the first few times) and transition to his homework. Paul then reset the timer for 15 minutes and told Karl "when the red is gone you may read a comic book." Karl continued to transition between his favorite activities and his homework while using the visual timer until the homework was complete. Eventually, Paul could put up to 30 minutes on the timer during homework time before Karl needed a break. He also found that using the timer for other transitions while at home and out in the community was helpful. He used it at the arcade to let Karl know when he would have to leave (he used the watch timer for this transition) and at home when it was time to empty the dishwasher.

# Before a Transition: Visual Countdown

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202478185-Picture2_large.jpg)

Another visual transition strategy to use prior to a transition is a visual countdown system. Like the visual timer, a visual countdown allows an individual to "see" how much time remains in an activity. The countdown differs, however, because no specific time increment is used. This tool is beneficial if the timing of the transition needs to be flexible.

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202479737-Picture10_large.jpg)

Team members deciding to use this strategy need to make a countdown tool. This can be numbered or colored squares, as used in these photos, or any shape or style that is meaningful to the individual. As the transition nears, a team member takes off the top item (e.g., the number 5) so the individual is able to see that only four items remain. The team member decides how quickly or slowly to remove the remaining items, depending on when the transition will occur.

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202479821-Picture11_large.jpg)

Two minutes may elapse between the removal of number 3 and number 2, while more time may elapse before the final number is removed. Once the final item is removed, the individual is taught that it is time to transition.

## Case Study: Robyn

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202481713-Picture29_large.jpg)

Robyn, an individual with ASD, is employed at a restaurant washing dishes. Today she will be expected to attend a health and safety training session. The restaurant staff knows that the trainer is notoriously late and warns Robyn's job coach not to have Robyn go to the training room at the assigned time-she'll be there waiting for a while. The job coach knows that waiting is difficult for Robyn and wants her to arrive at the training just when it is about to begin. Since the start time is unknown (due to the unpredictable trainer), the job coach begins using the visual countdown about 10 minutes before the training is expected to start. The job coach draws Robyn's attention to the visual countdown as she pulls the number 5 off. Five minutes later she pulls off number 4, then shortly after number 3. Robyn continues to wash dishes but periodically refers to the visual countdown to see how many numbers remain. Once the job coach sees that the trainer has arrived (15 minutes late!), she pulls off number 2. After the trainer has set up and ready for the trainees to arrive, the job coach removes number 1, and Robyn knows it is time to transition. The visual countdown assists during the transition, allowing Robyn to arrive at the training right on time, and helping her to avoid a long and potentially difficult wait.

**Before and During a Transition: Objects, Photos, Icons, and Words**

A thorough description of visual schedules and how to create an appropriate schedule for individuals with ASD can be found in the Visual Supports module. Several of the components will be addressed in this module as well, as they are particularly helpful during times of transition. In general, consistent use of visual schedules with individuals with ASD can assist in successful transitions. Visual schedules allow individuals to view an upcoming activity, gain a better understanding of the sequence of activities that will occur, and increase overall predictability. Several studies have consistently indicated that visual schedules used in classrooms and home settings can assist in decreasing transition time and challenging behaviors during transitions, as well as increase student independence during transitions (Dettmer et al., 2000).

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202480163-Picture15_large.jpg)

Research has indicated that using a visual cue during a transition can decrease challenging behavior and increase compliance with transition demands (Schmit, Alper, Raschke, & Ryndak, 2000). In one study, photo cues were used with a young boy with autism during transitions from one classroom activity to another, from the playground to inside the classroom, and from one room within the school to another (Schmit et al., 2000). At transition times, the staff presented the student with a photo of the location where he would be going. This allowed him to see where he was expected to go and provided additional predictability in his day.

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202480009-Picture14_large.jpg)

Other formats of information, such as objects, black-line drawings, or written words may be used to provide similar information to individuals. It is helpful for the individual to carry the information to the assigned location as it allows him/her to continually reference the information about where he/she is headed as the transition occurs. Once arriving at the destination consider creating a designated "spot" for the individual to place the information, such as an envelope or small box. This signals to the individual that he/she has arrived at the correct place.

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202479866-Picture12_large.jpg)

For example, if a student is a concrete learner, handing him an object that represents the area that he will be transitioning to may be most meaningful. If he is to transition to work with a teacher, staff may hand him a task that will be used during the work time to indicate it is time to transition to that location.

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202480408-Picture16_large.jpg)

Another student may be given a photo of the work with teacher area, whereas yet another student may be given a written card that says "teacher." When the student arrives at the teacher area, he may use the task in the activity or place the photo or word card in a designated spot. These cues provide advance notice and may assist with receptive language (understanding what is being said). Examples of a transition object (a book representing the reading center), a transition photo (picture of the teacher work area and the matching photo located at the teacher table), and a written card (the word "teacher" is given to the student and matched to a corresponding written cue at the teacher area) are shown.

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202480489-Picture17_large.jpg)

Showing one piece of visual information at a time during transitions may be helpful for many individuals with ASD. Others may benefit from seeing a sequence of two activities so they can better predict what will take place during the day. It is important for the team working with the individual to assess how much information is helpful at transition times. A "First/Then" sequence of information may be useful as individuals can see what activity they are completing currently and what activity will occur next. This may help an individual transition to a location that is not preferred if he/she is able to see that a preferred activity is coming next. A "First/Then" should be portable and move with the individual as he/she transitions.

# Before and During a Transition: Transition Cards

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202480553-Picture18_large.jpg)

Other individuals with ASD may find that longer sequences of visual information are more effective in alleviating transition difficulties. They might benefit from the use of a visual schedule that is located in a central transition area in the home, classroom, or employment setting.

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202480633-Picture19_large.jpg)

Instead of the information coming to the individual as discussed previously, now they have to travel to the schedule to get the object, photo, icon, or words that describe the next activity or location. If the schedule is centrally located, individuals need a cue to know when and how to transition to their schedules to get information. Using a consistent visual cue to indicate when it is time to transition is beneficial, as concrete cues can reduce confusion and help in developing productive transition routines. When it is time for an individual to access his visual schedule, present him/her with a visual cue that means "go check your schedule."

The cue can be the individual's name, a photo of the individual, a picture of something that is meaningful to the individual, or any visual symbol the team selects.

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202480749-Picture21_large.jpg)

The individual is taught to carry the visual cue to his/her schedule, match the cue in a designated location, and refer to the schedule for the next activity. Using the visual cue regularly helps predict the transition routine. The visual cue may be more salient and meaningful to the individual than repeated verbal cues. Examples of transition cues, including visuals that read "Check Schedule" and match a corresponding pocket above daily schedules, and a picture of Barney that serves as a transition cue for a young girl (who also matches it to a corresponding pocket near her daily schedule) are shown.

## Case Study: Dinah



Bath time for Dinah had always been tricky. Dinah, a 7-year-old with autism, decided long ago that she did not enjoy water, getting shampoo in her eyes, being scrubbed, or feeling cold when getting out of the water. However, she did enjoy watching her favorite video right after her bath each night. Dinah did enjoy however, watching her favorite video right after her bath each night. All during bath time her mom would tell her about the upcoming movie, hoping that would motivate her to make it through the bath successfully. Unfortunately, talking about the video seemed to just upset Dinah more.

Dinah's mom decided to use a First/Then system to help her transition to bath time. She drew a picture of the bathtub on one index card and velcroed that to one half of a clipboard. She drew a picture of the main character in the video on another index card and velcroed it to the other half of the clipboard. At bath time, she showed Dinah the First/Then and pointed to the visuals saying, "First bath, then video." She kept the system visible to Dinah throughout the bath, and as soon as bath time was finished, she removed the bath time index card and said, "Bath is finished; next is video." Though the transition to bath time was still rough for a few nights, Dinah learned she could count on the First/Then system to help her though the transition. Seeing the picture of the video seemed to be more meaningful for her than hearing the verbal description of the movie during bath time. Dinah's mom began to think about other challenging transitions in Dinah's day and how the First/Then system might help.

## Case Study: Garrett

Getting her middle school students to come in from the playground was always difficult for Mrs. Bechtel, especially on a warm and sunny day. It was most difficult for Garrett, her student with ASD, to make it inside on time. He was very interested in plants and insects and preferred to be outside exploring rather than inside working. Once inside the classroom, he transitioned fine from activity to activity using a written schedule that he carried with him in a binder. He didn't take it outside since there was so much activity and it was likely to get lost (and that would be a big mess!). Because Garrett's schedule was so meaningful to him and so helpful in the classroom, Mrs. Bechtel decided to add a component that could be used outdoors. On a laminated strip of yellow paper (Garrett's favorite color), she wrote "Time to check your schedule." She also added a few insect drawings to peak his interest. On his schedule, she added a small yellow envelope where he could put the laminated strips once he arrived at his schedule. She taught him how they would be used and practiced with him a few times.

After recess the next day she found Garrett on the playground and passed him his transition card. Once he received it, he was driven to put it where it belonged-with his schedule. His transitions were much smoother and after several weeks a peer helper could hand him the transition card at the end of recess and Garrett could successfully make it back to class on time.

# Before and During a Transition: Finished Boxes

Another visual transition strategy that can be used before and during a transition is a "finished" box. This is a designated location where individuals place items that they are finished with when it is time to transition. When it is time to transition it is often helpful to have an assigned location to put materials prior to moving on to the next activity. The box may be located in the individual's work area or in any center of the classroom or room in the home, and may be labeled with the word or a visual cue to indicate its purpose. Research indicates that the finished box, in combination with several other visual strategies, was helpful during transitions from work time to free time for a young student with ASD (Dettmer et al., 2000). When work time or free time was finished (as indicated by a Time Timer**)**, the student was instructed to put his items in the finished box before transitioning. This assisted helped create a clear and predictable transition routine, which decreased transition time and increased positive behavior.

Similarly, team members may decide that a "To Finish Later" box may be appropriate for an individual with ASD. This may used during transitions when an individual has not had time to complete an assigned activity. Often, individuals with ASD prefer to complete an activity before moving on, and this may not be possible due to time constraints (e.g., family member has an appointment, it is time to go to the cafeteria, the work shift is over). In these cases, establishing a location where the individual knows he/she can find the materials to finish up at a later time or date may be helpful.

## Case Study: Jacob

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202481193-Picture23_large.jpg)

Jacob was a 4-year-old preschooler with autism. He didn't seem to have an understanding of when activities were finished and spent much of the day roaming from one location to the next. He wasn't sure how or when to transition. His teacher, Ms. Rachel, decided to start using a "Finished" box with him when they were working on pre-academic activities. When each task was finished, she taught him to put it in the box. When all assignments were in the box, Jacob learned that the activity was finished and it was time to transition. Ms. Rachel started using the "Finished" box concept in other centers to try to increase the time Jacob spent engaged and decrease the amount of wandering time. She set one up at the puzzle center and set out three puzzles for him to do. He finished each and placed it in the box. After putting in all three, he knew it was time to move on. Soon Ms. Rachel could put out four or five items for him to complete before transitioning. Because the "Finished" box was a predictable component of his transition routine, Jacob was gradually able to lengthen his time in each area.

## Case Study: Natalie

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202480961-Picture22_large.jpg)

Natalie was 23-year-old woman with autism who worked in an office setting. She had a 30-minute lunch break and a 15-minute break during her six-hour shift. During her breaks, she enjoyed reading lengthy novels about historical events. Sometimes she was so engrossed in her reading that it was difficult for her to put the book down and return to work. Her employer was concerned that she was taking extra long lunches and breaks and decided to speak with the case worker who had helped Natalie get the job.

The case worker helped to implement a "To Finish Later" box for Natalie, along with using a Time Timer. The case worker set the timer at lunch and breaks and told Natalie that her book would be placed in the box at transitions. Natalie could see the book in the box and knew she would be able to return to it at her next break or at the end of her shift. The visual reminder helped her remember that she could soon read the book again and made transitions smoother and timelier. Eventually, Natalie could set the timer and set up the box herself, and she continued to use these strategies with success.

# Auditory Strategies

Individuals with ASD also respond to auditory cues in transition situations. Order of presentation and preference of request can impact the success of any auditory cue or strategy. This section of the module will focus on auditory strategies to assist individuals with ASD as they participate in transitions.

# Before a Transition: Verbal or Auditory Cues

[](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/up_img/1202481233-Picture24_large.jpg)

The simplest approach in preparing individuals for an upcoming transition is to provide verbal advance warning, such as "In 2 minutes we will go to music." It is likely most beneficial to address the verbal specifically to the individual with ASD, as well as to the larger group. One study describes how an adult with autism was given advance warning several minutes before a transition during some transitions, and no advance warning during others. During transitions without advance verbal notification, an increase in stereotypic behavior was observed (Tustin, 1995).

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Other auditory cues may assist in more successful transitions, including using a bell or timer to signal a transition, playing music when it is time to stop an activity and clean up, or singing. The research on using these auditory cues with individuals with ASD is limited. However, is clear that any advanced warning along with the development of a predictable transition routine is beneficial.

## Case Study: Verbal or Auditory Cue

When it's time for Jeff, her 6-year-old son with Asperger's, to put away his beloved Thomas the Train toys to get ready for dinner, Katie always gears up for a struggle. "Today," she thought, "I am going to try something different." She remembered back to his days in preschool when the teachers would sing when it was time to put the toys away. She had heard the song so many times when she came to pick him up that she still remembered the words.

She approached Jeff as he played and began singing, "Clean up, clean up, everybody, everywhere. Clean up, clean up, everybody do your share." At first he was taken aback-he hadn't heard that since preschool. But slowly he began to pick up. "I think this is working!" she thought. She sang it again, and by the end of the third round, all of the Thomas toys were put away. Katie realized what a strong transition routine had been created at preschool. "The song is a little babyish," she thought, "but until I can think of another, cooler, song, we're using it." Eventually she and Jeff developed a new transition song that incorporated Thomas, and it usually only took two to three verses before Jeff was ready to transition to dinner.

**Before a Transition: High Probability Requests**

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A high-probability intervention involves quickly presenting several easy high-probability requests prior to presenting a more difficult or low-probability directive (Banda & Kunda, 2006). A high-probability request is a directive or question that an individual is very likely to follow or respond to appropriately. High-probability requests may include "Give me a high 5," "Come get the candy," or "Get out your toys," or asking for a response to questions such as "What is your name?" and "How are you?" High-probability requests will vary individual by individual depending on what is interesting and motivating to a given person. Low-probability requests are directives or questions that an individual is not likely to follow or respond to appropriately. These may include requests to complete activities that are less appealing or more difficult, or responding to questions that are more complex or challenging. Low-probability requests also vary by individual, but may include requests such as "Clean up," "Time to go," or "Start your work."

Research has shown that an easy-hard sequence seems to decrease resistance to following through with difficult tasks, establishing "behavioral momentum" (Banda & Kunda, 2006). Recent research applied this intervention strategy to three transition times of a middle school student with autism (Banda & Kunda, 2006).

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Transitions to the locker, to the schedule, and to emptying the backpack were targeted, as the student often ignored requests to complete these transitions or engaged in challenging behaviors during these times. The teacher identified several questions that the student could easily respond to, such as "Did you watch football yesterday?," "How was your day?," and "Who dropped you off at school today?" Several of these requests for responses were given prior to asking the student to comply with the transition requests ("Please empty your backpack"). The overall transition time decreased and fewer prompts by adults were required during transitions. Presenting a series of high-probability requests (e.g., "Give me a thumbs-up," "Say your name") prior to requesting that an individual transition (a low-probability request) may be a beneficial strategy for individual with ASD during transition times.

**After a Transition: Auditory Cues**

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Another auditory transition strategy that has been researched involves ringing a bell after the individual has arrived at the new location or activity. A study described how three young children with autism were taught to ring a bell after transitioning from circle to work time, from snack to the bathroom, and from circle to language time (Sainato et al., 1987). The children were given the direction "Go to the work area and ring the bell." Using this intervention, the children decreased their transition time and increased their appropriate behavior during transitions. Using the bell as the endpoint may have provided the children with a salient cue to help them focus on where they were headed, and ringing the bell seemed to be reinforcing to the students (Sainato et al., 1987).

# Other Considerations

Along with developing predictable and consistent transition routines, team members may also need to consider adjusting the activities that individuals are transitioning to and from if transition difficulty continues. Factors such as the length and difficulty level of an activity and the interest level of an individual may contribute to transition issues. Similarly, if an area is too crowded, loud, over-stimulating or averse, for some reason, individuals may resist transitioning to that location. A review of environmental factors that could contribute to transition difficulties is recommended. In addition, the sequence of activities may need to be reviewed. Team members may benefit from reviewing the activities required of the individual throughout the day and categorizing them as preferred, non-preferred, or neutral. If the individual has difficulty transitioning it may be wise, when possible, to strategically sequence certain activities so individuals are moving from non-preferred activities to preferred activities and from preferred activities to neutral activities. Though this will probably not be possible for all of an individual's transitions, it may alleviate some transition challenges.

It is important for the team to continually assess how transitions impact individuals with ASD. Depending on the activity, the environment, and the specific needs and strengths of the individual, a variety of transition strategies may be appropriate. Through the use of these strategies, research shows that individuals with ASD can more easily move from one activity or location to another, increase their independence, and more successfully participate in activities at home, school, and the workplace.

**Post-Assessment**

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Post-Assessment

It is best to try to avoid transitions when working with individuals with ASD.

Select an answer for question 100

Using a loud timer to signal when to move from one activity to another is the best way to transition students with ASD.

Select an answer for question 110

Transition strategies can be used:

Select an answer for question 111

Difficulty transitioning may be a component of the diagnostic criteria for autism.

Select an answer for question 112

Transition strategies should only be implemented by psychologists or behavior analysts.

Select an answer for question 113

Video priming is an effective transition strategy if:

Select an answer for question 114

Transition strategies can occur after the transition has taken place.

Select an answer for question 115

Transition strategies should be used only for big transitions, such as moving from one setting to another (e.g., going from classroom to field trip location or from home to work setting).

Select an answer for question 116

What types of situations would require the use of transition supports?

Select an answer for question 117

Transitions strategies should be used for the first transition and then quickly faded.

Select an answer for question 118

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# Discussion Questions

[ [Export PDF with Answers](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/pdf_dis_ques.php?mod_id=12) | [Export PDF without Answers](http://www.autisminternetmodules.org/pdf_dis_ques.php?mod_id=12&no_answer=1) ]

1. **Why are transition strategies often a helpful intervention when working with individuals with ASD?**

Transition strategies can help provide predictability for individuals on the spectrum, as well as assist in increasing comprehension while reducing anxiety. These strategies allow an individual to "see" an upcoming transition or to prepare for the change of activity or location in some way.

1. **What transitions have you noticed are particularly difficult for individuals on the spectrum you support?**

Answers will vary but may include transitions to non-preferred activities (such as academic work or chores,) transitions in and out of a location (out of the house, into a store,) and/or to new locations (like a field trip, doctor's office, or ball game).

1. **How might an educator, parent, or employer incorporate transition strategies into the daily routines?**

Transition strategies can be incorporated into an individual's day in a variety of ways. Individuals may watch a short video in the morning of upcoming transitions, read a story about what to expect, or pay attention to timers (auditory or visual) to signal when an activity is completed. They may also use visual schedules that provide support at transitions or a finished box to place items before moving to the next location. A number of strategies in a variety of combinations may be used with any individual in any setting.

# Citation and References

If included in presentations or publications, credit should be given to the authors of this module. Please use the citation below to reference this content.

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