

Teaching that change is okay

Tips for parents and caregivers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Ways to help your child with changes:

- Reward your child when he or she deals with change appropriately, no matter how small the change.
- Role-play situations that may be difficult and practice the preferred behaviour.
- Talk about the possibility of change. For example: “If it rains we can’t go to the park. What should we do instead?”
- Show your child how to deal with change appropriately. For example: “I really wanted to go to the store, but when I got there it was closed. Oh well, I can try again tomorrow.”
- Read or make up stories about dealing with change.
- Provide clear limits and ground rules, but when possible offer a choice within these boundaries. This gives your child some control. For example: “We have to wait here for the doctor, but what do you want to do while we wait?”
- Plan some changes during the day so your child can practice. For example:
 - Snacks or meals – food items, times or locations
 - Outings – destinations, dates or times
 - Household items – brand of toothpaste
 - Order of routines



Help your child experience change in small steps:

1. Set up a situation where your child can experience positive change in small steps. Here are two examples:
 - Schedule a less preferred activity (such as grocery shopping) for a certain date and time. Closer to the activity, tell your child that you have changed your mind and will be doing a preferred activity instead (such as going to the toy store).
 - Schedule a less preferred item for dinner (for example, chicken and vegetables). Closer to dinner, tell your child that you have changed your mind and will be having a preferred item instead (for example, grilled cheese sandwiches).

2. Once your child is able to experience changes (from less preferred to preferred activities or items), slowly begin to change the situations you create.

Here are some ways to do this:

- Schedule a preferred activity/item and change to a neutral or less preferred activity/item.
- Give your child a choice in the activity or item that you are changing.
- Make the changes bigger over time.
- Change the time of activities or items (practice waiting).
- Change the people who will be involved in an activity.

These steps help your child learn that change leads to different outcomes. Your child is beginning to accept change when he or she does not misbehave in situations that involve change.

Reward positive behaviour

At times, the change itself will lead to rewards. You can also give your child any preferred item along with praise when he or she responds appropriately to change.

What if it's not working?

If your child displays inappropriate behaviours do not give him or her a reward.

- Stay calm.
- Use a soothing voice.
- Let your child calm down before speaking to him or her.
- Be sympathetic and if appropriate, discuss what he or she could do differently next time.
- Try the suggestions on page 1 again.

For more information and support, contact the children's services in your community

