Supporting the Transition to High School: Caregiver Checklist

Starting high school is a big step. It can bring new opportunities, more independence, and exciting experiences. It can also be a big change for many autistic learners and their families. Together, you can plan supports that help your learner feel confident and ready for high school.

Check in with your learner often.
Include them in the transition process every step of the way. Encourage them to attend meetings, ask questions, share what helps them, talk about their goals and about any worries.

Here are some ways to support your learner's transition to high school:

- [ ] **Prepare for new routines and expectations.**

Start practicing skills that may support independence and organization, such as reading a timetable, navigating the school layout, organizing materials, and using calendars, reminders, or visual schedules.

Talk about what they are looking forward to, what their goals are, situations that may feel stressful and strategies that can help. Practice asking questions by incorporating role play at home to get them comfortable with asking educators for help or to clarify things.



Learn about transition supports.

Ask your school team what transition supports are available. These may include extra school visits, orientation days to locate classrooms, lockers and student services and summer or bridging programs that may lead to credits. Discuss what has worked well in the past for others and what you can do over the summer to help prepare for high school.

Connect with school team and share information.

Meet with the new school team who will support your learner, such as transition coordinators, special education staff, guidance counsellors, child and youth workers, or principals. Get to know who you will be communicating with at their new school and who you can come to with questions.

Create an **All About Me** profile to help the school team better understand your learner's strengths, interests, communication style, and other support needs. Your learner can complete the profile on their own or you can work on it together. The document can be emailed individually to each teacher, printed and brought to school, or done creatively as a pre-recorded video or audio recording.



Review educational supports and planning.

Before high school begins, review their **Individual Education Plan (IEP), Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC)** decisions, and Ontario Student Record (OSR) to ensure information is up to date and reflects current strengths and needs. Ask if your learner's current school can meet with the new school to share information and help plan.

You may want to discuss:

- Which supports will continue in high school and how they will be provided. (e.g. individualized accommodations, teaching strategies, sensory tools).
- Whether new supports may be helpful.
- How support plans will be communicated to the new school team (e.g. regular meetings, documented plans).

Remember: Transition planning is an ongoing process. As your learner grows and their needs change, their supports can be updated too.

☐ Explore social, academic, and extracurricular supports.

Talk about supports outside of the classroom, such as homework clubs, resource room access, peer programs, and extracurriculars that match interests. Joining clubs or activities can help build confidence, make friends, and create a sense of belonging. Knowing what's available ahead of time can help learners feel excited about getting involved.

Tip: Families may also wish to ask about courses to support organization, study skills, self-advocacy, executive functioning, and navigating high school expectations. These are sometimes called 'Learning Strategies' courses.



Plan for the future.

Talk with your learner about course planning and future goals. Understanding the different pathways can help your family make decisions that match their strengths, interests, and goals after high school and prepare the school team to help.

Did you know? Some learners may be eligible to attend school beyond age 18 and may benefit from additional time to work toward their education, transition, or post-school goals. Eligibility and programming can vary, discuss with your school team if it's an option for your learner.

For more information on graduation pathways, please visit Autism Ontario's "Options to High School Graduation" resource.



For additional information on the transition to high School, check out Autism Ontario's "Understanding the Transition to High School for Autistic Learners" Research Highlight.