

# TILTING TOGETHER

The Tilting the Seesaw for Teams Newsletter

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## HERE COMES TERM FOUR!

And what a year it  
has been

Now that we're into term four, a lot of students will be starting to prepare for changes coming in the New Year. The final term of the year can mean a lot of changes - perhaps an upcoming change in teacher or classroom, or even a change in school. Transitioning from primary to intermediate or high school can be an intimidating and stressful time for all students, but especially students with autism who may find change really tough.

So this is our transition edition - tips and tricks for the smaller changes that occur every day, as well as the bigger changes happening at the end of the school year. Remember that if you need help or further ideas, you can always get in touch with us at Autism NZ - and if you'd like to share any examples of things that have worked well for you, we'd love to hear about those too!

# TRICKY TRANSITIONS

## TIPS AND TRICKS

What are transitions and why can they be difficult?

Everyone is involved in a range of transitions throughout the day, and this is certainly true in the classroom. Transitions include things like:

- Going from home to school and vice versa
- Moving from one task to another
- Moving from morning tea or lunch times to class time
- Changing location - inside to outside, mat to table, room to room, etc.
- Changing staff members

Transitions can be challenging for everyone, but can be particularly hard for autistic students. This is often due to challenges with coping with change - including changes that may seem small to others, especially neurotypical (non-autistic) people.

There are many ways to support autistic students in transitions. The Tilting course includes multiple strategies that can be for this purpose. But here are some ideas to jog your memory or help you get creative in considering transitions for your student or child!



### Transition Jobs

Sometimes having a task can do can help with transitions. For example, collecting dinner tickets from the family as a tool to transition between play time and sitting at the table, or handing out notices at school before joining the class (added bonus - the class is likely to be more quiet and settled a little after the bell).

### Transition Box

A transition box can be useful when entering a new space or task. It could contain familiar things that the person enjoys. This example has pictures of the people who will be in the space (i.e. teachers), some play dough, a sensory toy and a favourite treat. The child can engage with the box for a few minutes to make the move into the new space easier.



### Visual Supports

First/Then cards can be a very useful way of showing what is coming up and demonstrating the sequence of events. This gives the person prior warning and the ability to prepare for change. Using visual supports to demonstrate time passing is also a useful tool, as time can be an abstract concept. Even if a student can tell time, this may require reinforcement.

# MOVING ON – PREPARING FOR A NEW YEAR

Changing teacher, classroom or school is a significant event for many students, but again can be especially stressful for many autistic learners. Here are some ideas to Tilt the Seesaw and make an unpredictable and stressful situation a little easier:

## **Tell Me Why**

Some students may need information about why they are changing classrooms or schools. This is something we could write down in a story for understanding. For example, we may need to let the student know that most students change classrooms every year to have a chance to learn from another teacher, who is an expert at teaching the year they're entering into. Or, another student may need to know about the way the NZ curriculum is written and divided and that different schools (primary, intermediate, high school) address different learning.

## **Preparation, preparation, preparation!**

We can help with preparation by:

- Taking the student for a visit to the school/class/teacher before the end of the year, and/or before school starts again the following year
- Secure a copy of the class roll so the student knows which familiar students will be in their class
- Record a video (or take pictures) of the new setting, including the teacher, other school staff, where to place belongings/hang bag, what the inside of the classroom looks like, where breakout spaces are, etc. A video can be useful to remember more details, such as the sound of the teacher's voice
- Create visual supports showing times at the school (particularly if things will be different such as start times, shorter lessons, moving between rooms at high school, etc.)
- Obtain a floor plan and map routes between different classes or learning areas
- Request a timetable as soon as possible, especially for high school where there will be many changes and moves between lessons

Remember that some students may need information far in advance, while for others this might be stressful and they will need information much closer to the time.

## **Prepare for Transitioning from Holidays to School Time**

- Think about what changes might happen at home between holidays and school time, and practice - for example, start waking up earlier a week or so before school starts, so it's not a shock on the first day, practice taking the bus independently (including a trial run with someone driving behind if needed!) or practice eating lunch in different locations other than home. It might be useful for some students to try wearing the school uniform at home to get used to the way it feels, or rehearse getting ready and driving to school in the morning.

# MOVING ON – CONTINUED

## Create an 'About Me Profile'

It's helpful for new teachers and staff to have information about the young person and the ways in which they can be supported to have a positive experience at school. An 'About Me' profile is a great way to do this. The Ministry of Education does have a template that you can download from their website (<https://www.inclusive.tki.org.nz/assets/inclusive-education/resource-documents/MOE-Success-For-All-About-Me-Question-sheet-interactive-version.pdf>) or you may wish to create your own.

## Tips for an All About Me profile:

- Keep it short and simple, where possible

Teachers get a lot of information to read through, so we need to give them the most important information in a way that is accessible to them. This is especially useful for relief teachers who may have limited time to learn about individual students' needs.

- Include likes, strengths, and what the student CAN do

It's a good idea to include things the student is capable of achieving independently, their interests and things they are really good at - not just a list of challenges

- Include ways that the student is best supported in their learning
- Individualise - what information does the student need staff to know?

Some students, for example, may need a teacher to know about a routine that they need to follow, a way the student takes a break or a particular place they sit in the mat or classroom. Some students feel very concerned about this information being communicated, so make sure you know what is most important, and individualise accordingly!

## Consider Preparing Some Information for Other Students

It may be a good idea for the student to have information about themselves to share with other students about them and their autism. They may wish to prepare (or co-prepare) an About Me book, a slideshow that the student can share or find an appropriate resource or book that they can share with the class (for example, *Amazing Things Happen* (video), *All My Stripes* or *All Cats Have Asperger's*). Often when other students have information about why a student may have different ways of expressing themselves or need different accommodations, they can be much more understanding. And in many instances, the autistic student may feel empowered by sharing information themselves.



# RESOURCE BOX

Do you need some posters for your class or home? You can download and print these from the Tilting website, from the classroom resources section!

I HAVE SO MANY STRENGTHS WITHIN ME!

**AUTISM**.nz  
Every step together

FAIR ISN'T EVERYONE GETTING THE SAME THING  
FAIR IS EVERYONE GETTING WHAT THEY NEED TO BE SUCCESSFUL

THIS IS AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM!

**AUTISM**.nz  
Every step together

IN THIS SCHOOL  
BE PROUD  
OF HOW  
HARD YOU  
ARE TRYING  
YOUR EFFORT MATTERS!



I HAVE SO MUCH TO OFFER JUST BY BEING ME

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