

# Tips and Guidelines

Practical Life Skills

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## Start with Structure

Children with autism have an inordinate need for structure and predictability. Increasing the overall organization and predictability of the child's environment and providing visual cues and structure is vital when interacting with children with autism spectrum disorders.

## Consider these issues

### Physical layouts

- Use furniture and movable walls to visually separate one area from another (i.e. play area at home)
- Locate the material in the areas associated with the activities that occurs there (i.e. toys in play area, clothing in area where the child dresses, etc.)
- Be aware of noise levels, visual distractions and allow for quiet space

### Use of routines and schedules:

- What is happening today?
- What is different and unusual today?
- What is the sequence of events?
- When is the child finished and what is next?  
(clear beginnings and endings)

Transitions may be difficult for many children. Moving from one activity or location cannot be avoided, but children can be supported so that transitions are not so difficult. Some reasons for this difficulty may include:

- The child does not want to stop a preferred activity/person
- The child may be afraid that he will “never” get to do that activity again
- The child may be unable to stop immediately and need preparation for change and to process the request.
- The child may know what to do, but likes the attention he gets for not complying
- The child has a pattern of protest to avoid a new activity or believes it is too hard.

### Preparing for Transitions:

- Prepare the children for transitions by using the natural endings of certain activities. (*“The game is almost over” “One more push on the swing, then \_\_\_\_\_”*)
- Use chime, timer, song/music, countdowns to “signal” upcoming transitions
- If a child does not want to leave a preferred activity/item, let him know when he can have access to it again. (*“You can use play dough after dinner”*)
- Make a statement or give a clear direction. Avoid questions like ... (*“Do you want to go now?”*) if there is no option or choice.