

Settling back into school: using visuals video transcript

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[Katrina] Hello I'm Katrina Brooks, I'm an educational psychologist and I work with the Family Learning and Support hub part of the Bristol Autism Team.

[Josie] And I'm Josie Ball, I also work with the Bristol Autism Team. I'm also a mummy of two autistic children, so lots of experience there, and also a few family members who also have autism. So hopefully we can both help you.

[Katrina] Some of the parents we've been talking to over the last few weeks have said that their children have found it difficult settling back into school. Which is totally understandable, isn't it? After potentially so long at home, or even if they've been into school, schools have been quite different places. So, we just wanted to put together a video of a few ideas of some of the things that might support them trying to get back used to being in school again.

This session is around using visuals. So, we're just going to give you a few examples of some of the visuals that parents have found helpful. Please take anything that you think might be helpful, but don't feel like you need to do everything, because all of our children are different and some

things you might think 'oh yeah that might work' or some things you'll think 'right that's not gonna work'.

So, what we need to think about with our visuals is that, what they help to do is they help to give our children structure and consistency so that they really know what to expect in different situations. And if they have this structure and consistency then hopefully that can really reduce their anxiety at times when there's changes. And for our children it seems to be particularly transitions can be tricky for them. So, a visual can really help them remember what to expect and help reinforce what's going to come next, so that they don't have that insecurity about not knowing what's going to happen.

The visuals can help support help our children remember what to do at each step and I think sometimes for our children that can be really tricky for them, knowing a kind of process that they that they need to go through. So sometimes we can use visuals to help with those processes.

They can be supportive, sometimes parents think 'well actually my child's language is really good so, they don't need visuals', but actually a mum that we were speaking to last week said she realised because her child's anxiety levels had risen a little bit, but actually by doing a visual of the morning routine, even though he's got very good language skills, but she found he did refer to it, only a few times, he didn't need to have it next to him all the time, but he referred to it a few times and it really seemed to ease his anxiety because he remembered he knew it was written down in black and white what to expect each morning.

This can help parents with different parts of the day, so, it can help sometimes with the goodbye routine in the morning and can help our children separate because for some of our children they've been so used to being with somebody that knows them really, really well at home, it's that separation can be really tricky.

It can give them a bit of an understanding of a sense of time because I think sometimes it feels like the school days will go on forever and ever for them and it can be quite helpful as a reminder of what what's coming next, and what's at the end of the day to look forward to.

These are just a few ideas, there's many more ideas on the website on the Bristol Local Offer that Tanya Rawlinson put together at the middle of the first lockdown. If you just google 'local offer' and 'support for children with autism' then there'll be lots of ideas that come up.

Okay so we're going to show a few examples now.

[Josie] So, as Katrina said, it's quite important to really think about: where is it that I think my child struggles? And what point of the day is it that could it be that transition?

And I think to make you know, ultimately our children haven't been in school for a long time and that's going to be really difficult for them to get back into that whole routine of saying goodbye to mummy or daddy. And you know that separation there is a great place to put a visual. I love visuals for the fact they work. You know, it just makes everything so much smoother.

We have sort of a morning routine that I'll share with you. Where my child follows each step of his morning, and he'll move the actual visual himself and I find by doing this not only does it make our morning go more smoothly, so ultimately, you're going to be then making that transition into school a lot less anxiety, more smooth, it gets get it all done. So, I always add on my visuals a real incentive, so after he's finished eating breakfast, then getting dressed, brushing his hair, having a snack, he can then play on his iPad.

So, it's that that visual for me really gets the morning going. You're getting that routine, you're giving that structure that they really crave for to help bring them into you know, so they're just right, they're feeling just right, which then hopefully will then make that transition into school easier.

I've another visual that I've printed a few bits off the internet and stuck together.

But this is what we then follow, so from our morning to actually transition in from school. It's just got the morning steps here real simple, then there's this school visual here. But it's really important for my child on his transition to understand that actually school finishes and you'll be coming home and having a snuggle with mummy. Ultimately that's his thing at the end of his day and it was it was quite a big eye-opener really. We had all these visuals in place to get him into school, but actually just clarifying with him visually that school then finished and he got to come home and snuggle with mummy, that made it so much smoother.

It's also quite important to remember as well that transition will be tricky for your child, so having a visual there is great but also it needs to be followed

on, so we can put in lots in place at home to try and make that a smooth morning, and then a smooth transition with visuals, so they're really clear on what's going on. But then it needs to be followed at school. So, we find that putting all this in place it stopped at that point, then that transition was great, but then what do I do?

So, it's important to work with school and say, or maybe just telling your child you know, as you walk through the door go and sit in your seat and do three sums, or for my son it's when you walk through the door you go straight to the audio book and listen to a CD. So, it's just really clarifying that for them, reducing the anxiety so they know what's coming up next. They don't have to get worried about what's coming up, they can see that for them.

I find it with a lot of my visuals as well, they don't have to be in your face, if your child's getting that bit older and they are noticing, don't want people to see them with these handy visuals every day, just having one up on the wall that you might think they're not even using it, but they will be glancing at that. And just having that reassurance of 'okay yeah that is happening' really reduces the anxiety on those transitions, or throughout that day where you think that visual is needed.