

Supporting the Transition from Elementary to Middle School



Students experience a number of transitions throughout their educational career. They transition within the school building throughout the day, from grade to grade, and from one school to the next. With each new transition, students must adjust to new peers, teachers, and routines, as well as new rules and expectations within the school building (Lester & Cross, 2015; Lester, et. Al., 2013; Newman, et. Al., 2007; Pearson, et. Al., 2017).

Many researchers have investigated the topic of transition and its impact on individuals with disabilities, because these transitions include various stress factors. According to Hughes, et. al. (2013), students who experience a successful transition have a higher chance of greater psychosocial well-being throughout their school career.



This tip sheet focuses on the transition from elementary to middle school and what administrators can do to help support families, students, and teachers.

School/Family Collaboration

- » Studies show that when families are more highly engaged in a child's education, the benefits extend beyond academic into behavior and social-emotional skills (Reinke, Smith, & Herman, 2019).
- » Beginning the conversations **early** in the student's academic career can be one key to success. Although transition happens in 4th or 5th grade, begin conversations in early elementary school.
- » These conversations include the student's goals and desires for middle school as well as the family's. By discussing these early, plans can be made and implemented to ease the process.

Educator Role

- » Beginning the conversations in early elementary school allows the student to become more fluent with the process as well as find his/her voice.
- » One way to facilitate these conversations is through Person-Centered Planning (PCP).
- » "Nothing about me without me." This phrase helps us to remember that the student is a vital member of the IEP team and transition planning process. Students need to be an active participant in the process and have a voice in creating their plan.
- » Begin with a simple/short form for students to fill out on their instructional level. Build on it yearly and have conversations as interests and goals change as the student grows.
- » Person Centered Planning also involves parents.

TRIAD offers two free PCP courses.

1. Autism Transition Facilitator Course → Transition Tips for Students with ASD: Person-Centered Planning. Log in and launch at <https://bit.ly/4bTLMte>.
2. Transition Tips for Caregivers of Students with ASD. Log in and launch at <https://bit.ly/3K3hloc>.

To access, users must first register for an account. Learn more at triad.vkclearning.org.

Increase Familiarity

- » Some schools will include middle school visits as a field trip for all students near the end of their final year in elementary school.
- » These visits are of utmost importance for individuals with disabilities.
- » Instead of only one visit near the end of the year, think about scheduling them monthly during that last semester of elementary school. During the visit, ensure that the student walks through new and expected procedures in middle school and meets his/her new teachers.
- » Depending on the student, he/she may even benefit from a few visits during the summer, so back to school is less of a shock.

Social Narrative

- » One evidence-based practice to utilize during the transition is a social narrative.
- » A social narrative **describes**.
- » Social narratives are used to describe unfamiliar situations to increase predictability.
- » A social narrative to support your student in his/her transition is available for download with this resource. Instructions for making it your own are included. <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/social-narratives>



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