

ADJUSTING TO NEW SITUATIONS

COMPETENCIES: COMMUNITY LIVING SKILLS & SUPPORTS;
FAMILIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS



INTRODUCTION

Change is part of everyday life. The ability to change is central to our growth as individuals. For people with Autism, who often rely on predictability and routine to feel calm and safe, change can affect them differently. Adjusting to new situations may be met with anxiety, fear, or resistance. Fortunately, there are strategies you can use to ease adjustment to new situations.

PLAN AHEAD

Try to give advance notice about new situations, if possible. Share details about the change and how it could affect the person. Discuss the positive outcomes of the new situation or change. Use visual tools to provide predictability and structure. Examples may include:

- A countdown calendar
- A video or photographs of new people or settings
- A social narrative (e.g. a written and/or illustrated guide to a specific social setting, such as how to use public restrooms safely)
- An activity schedule using pictures
- A written daily agenda

DISCUSS AND PRACTICE COPING STRATEGIES

- Suggest use of calming strategies using fidgets (hand-held items that are non-intrusive and can be manipulated by the user, ranging from squeeze toys to knitting)
- Model positive self-talk
- Provide time to adjust before trying a new strategy
- Listen and validate the person's experience
- Offer breaks when needed

TEACH AND REINFORCE FLEXIBILITY

- Always positively reinforce attempts to cope with change
- During periods of routine, include new or different activities into daily schedules to build stamina for change

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW!

- 1 Test out the strategies described above for supporting someone through a small change. Make note of which methods work best for the individual and utilize these when planning for big changes.
- 2 New situations are not always predictable. Prepare yourself and the person you support by practicing coping strategies together and learn which strategies work for the person you're supporting. Remember, what works for you may not necessarily work for the person you're supporting.