

Ask the Expert Q&A #4

Transition to Middle School

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What are the most important considerations when thinking about transition to middle school?

Transitioning to middle school for students on the spectrum can be a very exciting time. Middle school is new for them and is usually a larger school. Also, they have opportunities to take different courses, meet new friends, and do different things after school, including sports or clubs. Along with all these new experiences, there may be some difficulty in learning the new building. We know that in middle school, the social complexity really ramps up, so sometimes the students on the spectrum have a hard time keeping up with relationships, as cliques and peer groups kick in as well. There are also more transitions throughout the day in middle school that can be difficult for students with ASD.

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What are the essential elements the teams need to know when preparing students with ASD for middle school?

One of the main things the teams need to do is ensuring that the student has a strong transition plan coming into middle school. Gather information from the elementary school team in the spring if possible. If not, have that team send all information and become familiar with that student's needs. Provide an orientation or tour of the building for the new student to help identify any potential areas of support needed in that regard. Another area of focus is in supporting the student's independence skills. This may include having visual supports in place at the beginning of the school year so students can navigate the school building better, understand what they need to bring from class to class, etc. The next essential thing the team needs to consider is the student's social skills. If there has not been much focus on this prior to middle school, finding ways to support these skills is important because the social world they are in has become more complex. Also, having support and input from caregivers at home can be very useful.

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Are there any tips for teachers who are thinking about the transition to middle school for students with ASD?

"Get ahead of the storm." This means making sure there is a strong transition plan in place before the student starts middle school. Another really important piece is working with parents, since they can provide a wealth of information and serve as a bridge between elementary and middle school.

This Q&A has been taken from "Ask the Expert Series" which are short videos that discuss important topics for parents, educators, community members, and individuals with ASD and can be found on the VCU-ACE website: <https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/asktheexpert/>