



Navigating Back to School Season With AAOM

*Contributed by Erik Gallery, BCBA, LBA,
Director - Access & Early Identification*

It's been 1 year since our last newsletter was dedicated to back to school needs, and here we are yet again, wondering where our summer went! For this edition of our back to school content, we wanted to present some of our tips from last year, with some expanded advice based on feedback we've heard since then. We hope this direction will provide some ease during a time of transition, whether you're caring for a returning student, or this year is the start of a new school journey!

Talk to your child about the upcoming school year: This doesn't have to be a formal, sit down conversation. This is an opportunity to keep your child aware of the transition, but also opens the door for you and your child to speak more on the subject. A visual tool can also be used during this time. Utilizing a calendar with the back to school date noted can aid a child in better anticipating this big change to their routine.

Find the fun where you can (easier said than done)!: Take your child back to school shopping, give them some control in this process...agree on specific supplies or an outfit they can choose themselves. Offering a bit of control in an anxious time can make a big difference.

Create a new morning routine and practice it: We all have high hopes as to what the perfect morning routine looks like...though it doesn't usually go the way we plan in our heads. Creating a morning routine ahead of time, and involving your child in the planning process can help to ensure they are both aware of this new routine, and have a voice in it, which can make it more motivating to actually follow.

You can find comfort in repetition: It's one thing to talk through these processes with your child, or utilize visual aids...it's another to physically experience the processes that may be eliciting problem behaviors. We have to remember that experiencing anxiety is a common experience for both neurotypical and neurodiverse students. Being able to experience/practice unknown or new routines can aid in diminishing a bit of that anxiety.

Don't worry about cramming in all this practice before the first day of school. There's still value in practicing these routines even on weekends. Just because we've gotten over the hill of the first day of school doesn't mean those anxieties are gone!

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Take a tour of the school, meet staff ahead of time (if possible): Even if your child is a returning student to the school, it can still be beneficial to see the location of a new classroom, gain a reminder on locations of bathrooms and other common areas. This act is another piece of easing that transition and keeping your child aware of coming changes. It never hurts to request to meet a teacher ahead of time, but be mindful that this may be difficult to arrange prior to the school year starting.

Keep school staff informed, provide a “snapshot” where needed: For children with specific needs, providing a 1 page overview of those items can be helpful. Items regarding dietary restrictions, sensory aversions, communication and behavioral needs, can all act as a great reference to the staff serving your child. It’s also beneficial to list reinforcing items and activities, as well as methods that are used to treat those needs should they arise in the classroom.



Where do I start with this “snapshot”?:

If this is your child’s first time in school, you may be stuck thinking about how to formalize all of the needs that you just inherently know about them. The easiest place to start is by outlining what their typical day outside of school would look like. What are the needs you need to be aware of at home or in the community...what environmental changes have you made in your home to make it more accessible for your child?

This could quickly fill up more than a single page for many families! Remember that your child’s teacher does have a classroom of students, so be focused where you can on the priority needs. Your teacher will also appreciate your thinking on how these needs will adapt to a classroom environment.

Ensuring any “plans” are in place for the first day and every day: Whether your child has an IEP, a behavior support plan, etc., it’s good to ensure that the accommodations and resources from those plans will be prepared for the first day of school. Don’t hesitate to request a meeting to ensure all parties, including potentially new staff, are clear on the expectations.

Be prepared for incoming communication: Your child’s educators are going to want to keep you in the loop about progress and needs where they can. Often they’ll need your support to ensure your child is having a successful school year. Be mindful that our educators serve many students and have limited windows of communication. Adapt where you can to keep that communication going!

Don’t be afraid to ask: A new school year can present needs and challenges that we can’t always anticipate, no matter how much we prepare. As resources and options are discussed, make sure you’re informed and understanding of the process. Never hesitate to ask for more guidance!

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Checking in on yourself: How are you doing in the midst of all this? In realizing that your own child is prone to the experience of anxiety, you must be aware of that same fact for yourself. It's a tough act to balance...being a strong advocate for your child, being their most significant support, but also keeping your own mental health in check. The first step is admitting that neither of us will always be successful across all of those areas at once.

Once we're aware of this, the next is knowing that if our own mental health isn't in balance, our emotions and actions can affect those around us, such as our children. Sometimes the fear and hesitation we have around change can be taken on by them. In preparing a plan for your child, ensure you've got one for yourself...whether it's a daily mental check in, or you're running through your own physical checklist each day.

A lot of work, but don't forget the reward!: When it comes to behavior, we know that we have to experience some kind of reinforcement to keep up the occurrence of a new routine. Sometimes that reinforcement can occur naturally, other times, not so much...so help to provide that for your child where you can!

Offering praise, even for small, progressive steps, can be a great place to start. When it comes to larger acts, such as making it through a full school day, completing homework...think about how you can build in natural rewards...is it a favorite meal for dinner, or a preferred activity afterwards? Moving forward, utilizing a tool like a token board (a quickly delivered, physical token towards a back up reward, e.g., earning 5 stickers to receive a weekend visit to an arcade).

If all works out, the enjoyment that your child experiences from this reward system will act as its own reward towards the work you're doing as well (however, there's nothing wrong with building your own system of reinforcement to keep you going)!

While the above items can provide general direction for navigating the start and progression of school, we realize that further resources may be needed in addressing more focused needs and special education support.

Feel free to access AAOM's Resource Directory if wishing to conduct this review independently:

[Resource Directory](#)

You can always reach out to one of our Navigators through the MiNavigator program if seeking individualized consultation or support for this need, or any other related to Autism. Get started here:

[MiNavigator](#)



Transition to Adulthood

Contributed by AAoM's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee

School has begun, which can be an exciting time, but also a stressful one. As our children get older it's natural to think about the next step. This can be especially daunting for our highschoolers that are about to enter adulthood. Transition planning may seem overwhelming, but here are some tips to keep in mind as you plan for the future.

Your overall plan can include goals for job placement or job skills training, independent living goals, financial goals, and/or social/romantic goals. Also keep in mind that family members or teachers can provide input related to goals and the overall plan for the future, but the individual should always be involved in all steps of the transition planning process.

Goals should be SMART. SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

Specific—concise, well defined, determines the who, what, when, where, and why

Measurable—How will you know when you've reached your goal? Develop key indicators that tell you that you're making progress

Achievable—make sure that the goal selected is a “just right challenge.” They should push the individual to expand their skill set, but shouldn't be overwhelming. Remember that you can always add more difficult goals after mastering smaller goals first!

Relevant—Are these goals working toward a common purpose? Are they supporting the individual's growth in the best way possible?

Time-Based—what is a realistic timeframe in which this goal can be achieved? Remember that you can always adjust timelines at a later date too.

cont.



Collaboration with your child's educators and health care providers can help promote a smoother transition. Your child's IEP team should meet regularly to assess goals and facilitate the transition to higher education, job training, or participation in community programs. There may be other mental health, behavioral health, or medical professionals who are providing care to your child and it is important to work with them to develop a plan for care.

Here are some other resources to consider when looking for additional support when planning for transition:

Community Mental Health <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/keep-mi-healthy/mentalhealth/mentalhealth/cmhsp/local-mental-health-services>

Michigan Rehabilitative Services <https://www.michigan.gov/leo/bureaus-agencies/mrs>

The Arc of Michigan <https://arcmi.org/>

Michigan Alliance for Families <https://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org/>

MiABLE <https://www.michigan.gov/mistudentaid/saving-and-planning/miable>



Our MiNavigator program assists families in finding resources to meet their individualized needs.
Consider connecting with a navigator today!



Navigating Autism Today: Grand Rapids Conference



Presented by
**Children's
Foundation**



**Friday,
November
17, 2023**

L.V. Eberhard Center,
Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids

Register Now!

For those interested in acting as a presenter at this conference, please complete the following form by 10/2/2023. You are welcome to share this form with colleagues/peers:

<https://forms.gle/FWJ35E8s3JA52rZf9>



**Saturday
September
23
2023**
Detroit Zoo



AutismAlliance
of Michigan

AUTISM ALLIANCE OF MICHIGAN PRESENTS

AUTISM HERO WALK: DETROIT

PRESENTED BY **DTE** Foundation



LEARN MORE! FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT [AAOMI.ORG](https://aaomi.org) OR CALL 877.463.2266



Upcoming Community Events



Date	Event	Location
September 19	Support Group: IEP Info and School Help	Grand Rapids
September 19	Inspire Change Gala	Grand Rapids
September 23	Autism Community Day	Livonia
September 24	Teen and Young Adult Social Group: Bowling and Pizza Party	Wyoming
September 26	Sensory Story Time	Milford
September 27	Fall Into Fun	Midland
September 28	Awesome Autumn	Southfield
September 29	Yoga and Meditation	Marquette
October 2	Trip to Post Family Farms	Hudsonville
October 7	Dreams and Wings	Waterford

Looking for more to do?
Scan the QR Code for
more events!





Upbound Staffing, a fully integrated program within the Autism Alliance of Michigan, leads and supports disability-employment initiatives throughout the State of Michigan.

Contact Upbound Staffing:

Website: <https://upboundstaffing.com/>

Email: upbound@aaomi.org

Phone: [1-\(248\) 508-8693](tel:1-248-508-8693)



What is MiPAAC?

Michigan Parent Advocate Attorney Coalition (MiPAAC) powered by the Autism Alliance is a statewide group focused on student-centered advocacy.

MiPAAC convenes regularly to identify priorities to address issues which exist across our special education system.

Current priorities:

1. Access to equitable opportunities
2. Educational benefit through IEP implementation
3. Driving systemic change

Not a member of MiPAAC?



Join!

<https://mipaac.org/>



MiNavigator

The MiNavigator team is a group of professionals ready to serve and connect those touched by autism with the most up to date services and resources available in our state.

Contact MiNavigator:

Website: <https://aaomi.org/contact-minavigator/>

Phone: [877-463-2266](tel:877-463-2266)

Navigators are available Monday through Friday, from 9 am to 5pm

