

## Building up transition skills with a 3-year-old with a visual schedule

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### Executive summary

This case study is about a pupil who used a visual schedule to help him transition to different activities. The pupil will engage in behaviour that challenges when interrupted to move to a less preferred activity.

The visual schedule shows a picture of the activity the pupil is doing now, and a picture of the activity the pupil will be doing next. This board showing 'now & next' activities to the pupil, helped him understand what was coming next. Consistency by applying the board throughout the sessions played a key role as well. Therefore, we observed a reduction in behaviour that challenges and an increase in this pupil's independence with transitioning to different activities.

### Introduction

This study focuses on a 3-year-old with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). He was attending an Early Years' service underpinned by ABA twice a week. The aim of this service is to support families in learning how to engage their children from a very young age. So, the family work on a tailored curriculum, creating positive outcomes whilst being guided by a multidisciplinary team.

This pupil communicates through PECS and enjoys playing with books, numbers or letters, doing puzzles and using the car ramp. However, this pupil finds it difficult when his activity is interrupted, when he is asked to wait, when presented with demands, or when he is asked to transition. This learner exhibits a variety of behaviours that challenge, including some that may injure another person or himself. Some of the behaviours that this pupil engages are: crying, head butting, hitting, kicking, grabbing, among others.

In order to develop this pupil's skills, in Early

Years we focused on working on his communication so he was able to express himself during the sessions and in different environments. Additionally, he worked on waiting for increasing periods of time, on building up his tolerance towards transitioning from highly preferred activities; as well as focussing on his play skills.

### Method

Initially, this Early Years' pupil found it hard to transition from one activity to another one. It was therefore decided to introduce a 'promised reinforcer', helping him to move between activities. This pupil would be shown a motivating item before transitioning and he would access the toy once he had moved to the other activity.

This pupil was working on completing short transitions using a promised reinforcer, when it was observed that moving away from a small number of specific highly preferred activities was an issue. He would engage in behaviours that challenge, including headbutting when guided to move away from playing with the number cards or with the number book.

Consequently, we introduced a 'now & next' board to help this pupil understand what was happening. This 'now & next' board is a type of visual support used to help children anticipate transitions and upcoming activities (Vaughn, Fox, & Lentini, 2005). Figure 1 shows the 'now & next' board that we were using, and Figure 2 shows a table where all transitions were tallied comparing successful ones (when the pupil didn't engage in behaviour that challenges) versus not successful ones (when the pupil engaged in behaviour that challenges). During each session we made approximately 10 transitions, using the board on every single one. The visual board was presented to this pupil alongside an explanation, e.g. 'this activity is now finished and we are going to do this next'. As soon as the tutor or parent said the activity was finished, we guided the pupil away from the activity and onto the new one.

To build up this pupil's tolerance to transition to different activities, we started moving away from a highly preferred activity to another highly preferred activity, for example the trampoline. Thanks to being consistent and creating few opportunities throughout the session, the pupil started to transition away from highly preferred activities 100% of the time successfully.

With the aim of moving forward, the Early years team and this pupils' parent worked on transitioning from highly preferred

activities to medium preferred activities next. The same techniques were used, including the 'now & next' board. An example would be a transition from the number cards to writing.

## Results

Predictability is important for reducing anxiety and helping people with autism become successful (Shore & Rastelli, 2006). You can increase predictability for autistic people by implementing a daily schedule or a pre-planned series of steps for activities. Furthermore, the underpinning reasoning for this approach is that children who have language learning difficulties often show strengths in their visual skills (Archibold & Gathercole, 2006).

There are multiple reasons for the use of visual means to communicate the sequences of upcoming activities or events (Mesibov, Shea, & Schopler, 2004). First, the language might not be fully understood or might be forgotten, but visual communication is more likely to be comprehensive and can remain accessible. Second, visual schedules can facilitate the transitions that often are so difficult for individuals with ASD by looking at a schedule to understand what is coming next, and as such the inappropriate behaviours caused by disrupted expectations and confusing interruptions in activities and changes are generally reduced. Third, visual schedules help people with ASD to become as independent as possible of adult prompts. Because visual information is what they are most likely to understand, having individuals with ASD look to their visual schedule for this information to go from activity to activity maximizes the chances that they will not need additional prompting from adults.

We wanted our pupil to accept changes in the environment because he can rely on the visual schedule to communicate what is going to happen and in what sequence. Therefore, it was important that the now & next board was implemented thoroughly during the sessions. Also, that the board was consistent, so if the board showed that the pupil will be doing an art activity next, it had to be sure that the pupil is guided to join an art activity.

Hence, it was decided to introduce a now & next board (visual schedule) to help this pupil moving between activities. To track the progress, both quantitative and qualitative evidence were used to assess the results of a visual schedule (now & next board) approach to interrupt a pupil without him engaging in behaviour that challenges.

Qualitative information in the form of observation was documented on a daily log and notes from different settings, such as the conducts relevant to interrupts at home or in the community. Also, quantitative information was gathered in a

tally sheet for successful or not successful transitions (Figure 2) and the number of episodes of behaviour that challenges that occurred in the session due to a transition (Figure 3).

The now & next board was used every time so that the pupil would not just get used to the exposure of the board for only when he struggles leaving a preferred activity. So, the 'now & next' board was paired with transitions to preferred or highly preferred activities as well.

In summary, we can observe the progress with transitions to different activities made by this pupil. The visual schedule helped reduce the frequency of the behaviour that challenges when this pupil had to transition to a less preferred activity. Moreover, it was observed how it helped promote the independence of this pupil as with the use of the board, the promised reinforcer was no longer needed and towards the last sessions, the pupil didn't need the visual schedule to move away from activities on some occasions.

## Discussion

It was found that interruptions from highly preferred activities were difficult for this pupil. He was engaging in behaviour that challenges which made it difficult to ensure that he was accessing different activities. Evidently, these conditions were impacting his behaviour management and his learning acquisition. Consequently, it was very important that procedures to help reduce these difficulties were established.

Applying a visual schedule in the form of a 'now & next board', helped this learner's behaviour that challenges dramatically reduce. An increase in his independence was also observed, as he is now able to travel to some activities without prompts or reinforcement. In summary, this pupil can access learning and daily life activities with a different approach.

## References

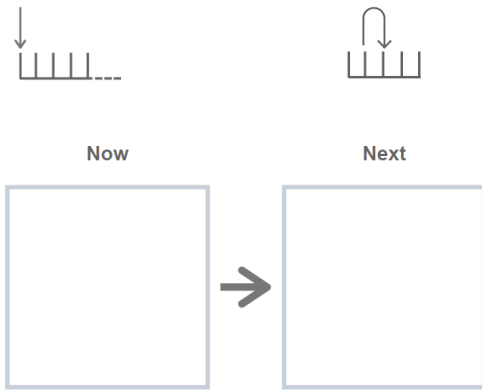
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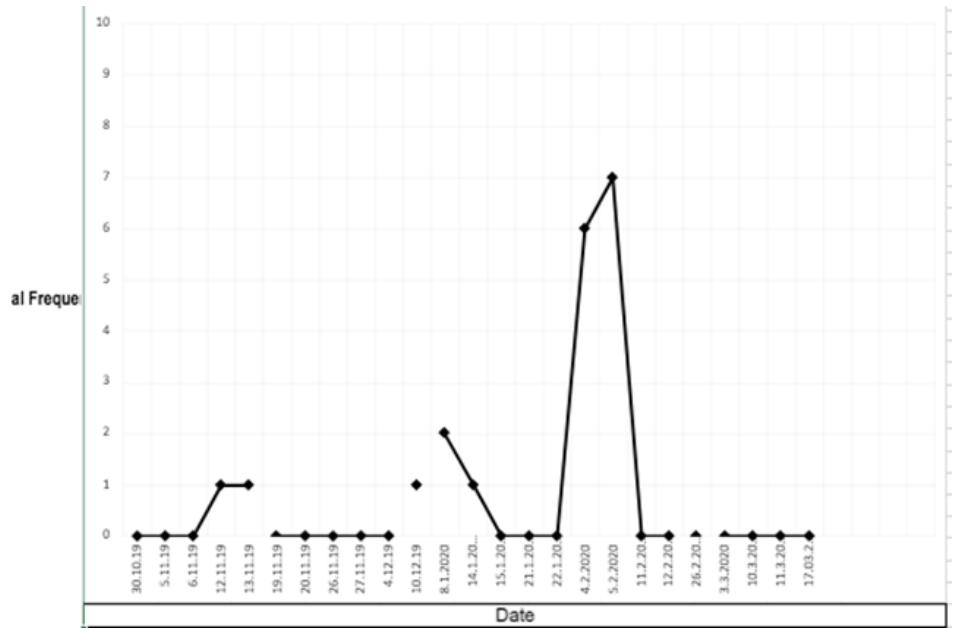
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**Figure 1 - now & next board**



**Figure 3 - transition behaviour graph**



**Figure 2 - transitions tally**

Ryan- Transitions tally sheet

Highly preferred activities: number cards, number book

Date	Successful (highly preferred to preferred activity)	Successful (preferred to preferred activity)	Not successful (highly preferred to preferred activity)	Not successful (preferred to preferred activity)
5.2.2020				+ bucket/story time
12.2.2020				
20.2.2020				
3.3.2020				
10.3.20				
11.3.20				
17.3.20				