

Moving house

Moving house is stressful for most people, but for someone with autism, for whom routine is important, change can be very difficult and lead to a lot of stress and anxiety.

This document tells you how to make the move more manageable for someone with autism from talking to them and explaining the move to using different ways to build up to the move and involving them in the actual move. Depending on the person, different things will work for different people.

Why are we moving?

It may help to explain why you are moving. Keep the reasons for moving positive and highlight things that may help someone with autism understand that things are going to change for the better. For example, we are moving so we have an extra bedroom and a bigger garden or we are closer to daddy's work. This may mean a bigger garden for their trampoline, away from the noise of cars so the noise will no longer hurt their ears. Or daddy may be able to spend more time at home with them. Think of examples to make the move more meaningful for your child.

Also point out the things that will stay the same, if that is the case. For example, you can still go to the same school and see Johnny. Tuesday is still swimming night and you will still have your favourite duvet.

The effects of the move

To start with, write down the changes that are going to take place. A move can be a small one of moving house within the same area, or it can be a big one of moving house and the area. Take into account all the different factors that may change. If it is a big move, the changes will include not only the house, but school, friends, local facilities and shops and you will need to put in more time to prepare the person with autism.

Bigger, more obvious changes may not affect some people with autism straight away. Small and subtle changes are likely to affect them more. For example, the fact that the front door is different, the light switches are in a different position or they can hear strange noises may affect them. In all cases, remember that it is important to make the person with autism aware of what is happening. Prepare them in advance for the change and, where possible, try to include them in the moving process. For example, you could get them to pack some of their things in boxes.

What will the move involve?

As soon as you know that you will be moving house, you need to make sure the individual with autism has an understanding of what moving house means. Give them information in an accessible format such as visual supports, pictures, photos, objects, written or spoken word.

When talking about moving, try to be consistent with your use of language to prevent or reduce confusion and possible anxiety.

You may find it difficult to tell someone about moving as moving house can be an uncertain process. It will help if you gradually expose the individual to the idea by talking generally about moving, and then giving them updates as the move becomes a reality and closer.

How to tell

When you have decided on a house, explain the process and then break it down into stages. Break the move down into months, weeks and until the day of the move. Some people with autism enjoy knowing about details, from putting in an offer to exchanging and completion.

Key areas of difficulty for someone with autism are sequencing the order of events and understanding time. For more information, see *Organising, sequencing and prioritising*. Contact our [Autism Helpline](#) for a copy.

Use visual supports and calendars to help understand the concept of time. It is probably best to wait until you have a definite date before doing this. Include a note close to the calendar or visual support that says Things may change. Below is an example of how to teach someone about time.

June				
Monday		7	14	21
Tuesday	1	8	15	22
Wednesday	2	9	16	23
Thursday	3	10	17	24
Friday	4	11	18 Moving house	25
Saturday	5	12	19	26
Sunday	6	13	20	27

By using ticks or covering up dates, calendars show the individual time left until the move.

Story books

Depending on the individuals level of understanding, story books that focus on the topic of moving house may help. For example, *Moving house*, by Usborne, is a story about moving for children (see *References and recommended reading*).

Social Stories™

Social Stories™ are also a helpful way of providing information to someone with autism.

Create your own book

Put together all the information you have about your new home in one place and make your own book. You could call it 'Our new house' or 'Tom and his families' new house'. You can use this book to answer questions about moving. You could include:

- Photos. Take photos of the house, the garden, their room and other rooms in the house.
- Maps. Mark the house and other important landmarks on it, such as their school, the park, grandma's house, friends' houses and local shops. You may have to be specific and write directions from your new home to some of these places.
- House layout. Where is their bedroom? Draw a plan of the house or do this with photos.

Finally, give the person with autism the chance to visit their new home and include photos of their visit in your book.

Their role in the move and on the day

Talk about jobs they may have to do. For example, they could help to pack things from their room. This will depend on their level of understanding and ability.

Moving house is a stressful time for everyone. For some individuals with autism, it may be better not to be present on the day. However, make it clear that they will be going to their new house on their return from the days activities.

For others, it may be better to be involved with the move on the day. This may help them to understand how their belongings were moved. If you do this, help them to understand their role on the day and explain who else will help and introduce them to any new people.

When you move, if possible, try to unpack their room first and arrange their furniture in a similar way to their old bedroom.

After the move

Try to keep their routine the same as before to stop someone with autism getting more stressed. You may not notice behavioural changes immediately, but weeks after the move.

I freely admit this is 'nicked' from the National Autism Society's website and can be found at:
<http://www.autism.org.uk/living-with-autism/at-home/moving-house.aspx>

So all credit goes to them for this useful article!