



AFRICAN NEURODIVERSITY MOVEMENT

Preparing for Change

A practical guide for neurodivergent children, adults, families, educators and employers

ANM NEURODIVERSITY TRANSITION TOOLKIT

Practical | Low-cost | Adaptable

USE THIS GUIDE YOUR WAY Read it together, translate or explain it in the language that feels natural, take photos of pages, turn key points into a voice note, or print only the worksheet and checklist you need.

Different Minds. United Africa.

Start here

A transition is any move from one situation, expectation, place, role or routine to another. It can be planned, sudden, welcome, unwanted or all of these at once. A new school class, a changed bus route, a new supervisor, a move between homes, a timetable change or a family event can all be transitions.

THE CENTRAL IDEA Do not wait for distress to prove that support is needed. Share information early, keep what can stay predictable, offer meaningful choices and make a clear plan for what happens if the change feels too much.

How to use this toolkit

1. Choose the section that fits the change: school, work, routines, communication, sensory preparation or visual supports.
2. Talk with the person affected. Their knowledge of what feels hard, what helps and what they want shared is the starting point.
3. Use the My Transition Plan worksheet to turn ideas into a simple, shared plan. Review it after the transition and keep what worked.

A culturally adaptable approach

- Use the person's preferred language, communication method and meaningful local examples. A plan can be spoken, handwritten, photographed or shared by voice note; it does not need expensive technology.
- Ask who should be involved. This may include a parent, sibling, trusted friend, educator, mentor, community supporter or colleague - but only with the person's agreement where possible.
- Plan for the actual context: transport, weather, access to a quiet place, mobile data, school resources, shift patterns, caregiving, safety and the distance between home, school and work.
- Protect dignity. Do not force disclosure, use shame, or make a person perform comfort for others. Support should reduce barriers, not pressure someone to hide their needs.

A note on safety and scope

This is an educational planning guide, not a clinical assessment or a substitute for local professional, safeguarding or emergency support. If there is an immediate risk of harm, seek urgent support through the relevant local service or emergency route.

School transitions *From first visits to the first few weeks*

School changes are not only about learning. They can change travel, sounds, uniforms, food, social expectations, toilets, adult relationships, languages used and the number of decisions a learner has to make. Make the plan specific to the learner and the setting.

Start with four practical questions

- What will be new: place, people, route, timetable, uniform, subjects, rules or support arrangements?
- What can stay the same: a familiar item, trusted adult, communication card, morning routine, seat, snack or drop-off ritual?
- What needs to be practised: the journey, gate, classroom, toilet, lunch queue, calling for help, using a visual schedule or asking for a break?
- Who owns each action: learner, parent/carer, class teacher, SEND lead, headteacher, transport provider or another trusted adult?

A transition sequence that respects the learner

Before the change

- [] Give an honest, simple preview. Say what is known and what is still unknown.
- [] Arrange a short visit, photos, video or walk-through if this is welcome and possible.
- [] Make a one-page 'people and places' guide: key adults, classroom, toilets, quiet place and collection point.
- [] Agree a first-week plan: arrival, breaks, communication, exit/re-entry and who checks in.

During and after

- [] Keep demands light while the learner is learning the new routine.
- [] Let the learner use a familiar regulation tool or planned break without making it a reward.
- [] Check in privately. Ask what was hard, what helped and what should change tomorrow.
- [] Review after the first day, first week and first month. Small adjustments matter.

USEFUL HANDOVER A handover is not a list of deficits. Share strengths, interests, communication preferences, sensory needs, successful supports, early signs of overload and what respectful help looks like. Ask the learner what they want included.

Low-resource visual supports

A folded paper schedule, drawings, photographs from a basic phone, colour-coded exercise books, a small 'help' card, a written route, or a trusted adult's number can be enough. Do not delay support because a polished app or printer is unavailable.

Workplace transitions *Roles, managers, spaces, schedules and systems*

A workplace transition might be a new job, return from leave, promotion, new manager, office move, shift change, software change, restructure or changed workload. Support is stronger when it is planned before performance problems are assumed.

What inclusive employers can do

- Tell people about the change early, in writing and verbally where useful. State what is changing, when it takes effect, what stays the same and where to ask questions.
- Offer a named contact for transition questions and agree how the person prefers to communicate: message, email, call, meeting notes, checklist or visual map.
- Make tasks visible. Break the first days or weeks into clear priorities, examples of completed work, deadlines and check-in points.
- Plan the physical environment: desk, lighting, noise, commute, workstation, toilets, break area, quiet space and any safety requirements.
- Keep disclosure voluntary. Share information only with consent and only as far as needed to put support in place.

A manager's transition conversation

Ask	Agree
☐ What would make the first two weeks clearer or less draining?	☐ The few priorities that matter first.
☐ What information do you want in advance?	☐ A realistic check-in rhythm and a backup contact.
☐ How should I give updates or feedback?	☐ What flexibility is possible around space, timing, breaks or task sequencing.
☐ What is an early sign that the plan needs adjusting?	☐ A date to review support without making the person request it again.

IMPORTANT Adjustments are not special treatment. They are practical ways to remove barriers so a person can show their skills. Country-specific employment rights vary; use this guide alongside local policy and legal advice where needed.

For the employee

If you choose to share needs, you can keep it practical: 'A written list of priorities helps me start well'; 'Please let me know before a last-minute meeting if possible'; 'I may need five minutes in a quieter place after a crowded briefing.' You do not owe anyone your whole story to ask for a workable arrangement.

Routine changes and communication

When an ordinary routine changes

Routine changes can be small on paper and still take real effort: a different meal, visitor, route, pick-up person, class venue, work shift, appointment time, power cut or cancelled plan. Prepare the 'change inside the change' - the practical details that often get missed.

Build a change buffer

- [] Give advance warning when you can: days, hours, then a short reminder.
- [] Use a countdown that fits the person: calendar, phone alarm, written note or verbal reminder.
- [] Keep one familiar anchor: same breakfast, music, object, seat, person or decompression time.
- [] Plan extra time for getting ready, travel and recovery.

If change is sudden

- [] Name it clearly: 'The plan has changed.' Avoid pretending nothing happened.
- [] Say what is known now and when you will update again.
- [] Offer a small, real choice where safe: wait here or there; message or call; take the quieter route or leave later.
- [] Reduce non-essential demands until the new plan is understood.

Communicating upcoming changes

A useful change message answers four questions. Put it in the order that makes sense to the person, and repeat it without judgement if needed.

QUESTION	WHAT TO SAY OR SHOW
What is changing?	Use direct words and one clear example. Avoid vague phrases such as 'we will see'.
When will it happen?	Give the date/time if known, then link it to a familiar marker: after breakfast, after assembly, after the team meeting.
What stays the same?	Name the familiar people, routine, items or support that will still be there.
How do I get help?	Show the person, place, word, card or message they can use - and what will happen next.

Sensory preparation and visual supports

Prepare the sensory details, not only the timetable

A new environment may bring different noise, crowds, touch, light, smells, heat, textures, food, travel or waiting. Ask about these before the first day. The aim is not to make a person tolerate every barrier; it is to reduce avoidable strain and agree what helps.

Plan ahead	In the moment
[] Visit at a quieter time or look at photos/video if that is preferred. [] Identify a lower-stimulation route, waiting place and exit point. [] Check clothing, uniform, footwear, ID badge, lunch, water, medication and transport needs. [] Agree what sensory tools can be carried or kept nearby.	[] Use the agreed break word, signal or card without asking the person to explain publicly. [] Offer water, movement, quiet, lower light, fewer people or a short reset when available. [] Avoid touch, demands or repeated questions unless the person has said these are helpful. [] After a demanding change, plan recovery time before another major demand.

Visual supports that work in real life

- Keep them small and specific: a two-step first-morning card is often more useful than a crowded full-term poster.
- Use pictures, objects, drawings, words, colours or a mix. The best format is the one the person understands and will use.
- Show the order: first / then / next / finished. Include waiting, travel, breaks and the end of the day.
- Make supports portable: photo on a phone, notebook page, laminated card, keyring card, WhatsApp image or written note.
- Offer a 'change card' for when the visual plan is no longer correct: 'The plan changed. Next, we will ...' This protects trust.

ASK BEFORE CHOOSING Some people find visuals calming; others prefer spoken information, a message, a written list or no reminder until closer to the time. A support is only supportive when it is usable for that person.

Profile-aware support *Start with the person, not the label*

There is no single autistic, ADHD or PDA experience. These prompts can help people notice patterns, but they must never replace listening, consent or individual planning. Strengths, communication, sensory needs, culture, health, trauma history, language and environment all matter.

Autistic people

- Make expectations concrete. Say who, where, when, what happens first and what happens if the plan changes.
- Provide information early enough to process it. Offer a familiar person, place or activity as an anchor where this helps.
- Do not read quietness, eye contact, speech differences, stimming or withdrawal as a lack of understanding or a lack of care. Ask respectfully what support is wanted.

People with ADHD

- Externalise time and tasks: written priorities, alarms, visual steps, an agreed first action and shorter check-ins can reduce the load of holding everything in mind.
- Build movement, food, water and reset opportunities into the transition plan. A change can affect attention, sleep, energy and task initiation.
- Keep feedback specific and timely. Focus on the next workable step, rather than treating a missed step as a character flaw.

People who use PDA to describe their experience

Some people and families use PDA to describe an intense need for autonomy when demands feel threatening. This toolkit does not treat PDA as a diagnostic category. It takes the person's experience seriously: plan collaboratively, use respectful language, offer real choices, reduce unnecessary urgency where safe and avoid power struggles.

A PRACTICAL REFRAME Instead of 'You must do this now', try: 'This needs doing today. Would you like to start with A or B?' Instead of 'Calm down', try: 'I can see this got harder. Do you want quiet, information, time or help choosing the next step?'

When profiles overlap

A person may be autistic and have ADHD, use PDA language, or have other identities and support needs. Do not make them choose one explanation before you provide a clear plan, sensory support, communication choice and respectful flexibility.

Practical strategies by role

Families and supporters

- Make the first step tiny: pack the bag, look at one photo, practise one route, send one message or choose one item to take.
- Do not make the plan a test. If rehearsal creates more stress, stop and find a gentler way to preview the change.
- Share a strengths-and-supports note with consent. Keep it short enough that people will actually read it.
- Protect recovery time after the transition. Joy, shutdown, exhaustion, irritability or relief can all be information, not a reason to judge.

Educators

- Give a clear arrival routine and one named adult for the first days. Tell the learner where to go if that adult is unavailable.
- Explain hidden rules: where to sit, when to ask, how to get a break, where to queue, what materials are needed and how to leave a room safely.
- Keep parent/carer communication two-way. Ask what works at home and share what changed at school before it becomes a crisis.
- Review adjustments with the learner rather than withdrawing them because they 'seem settled'.

Employers and managers

- Describe the working day, work priorities, communication norms and success measures in writing. New staff should not have to guess the unwritten rules.
- Offer predictable check-ins and give advance notice of meetings, travel, changes to the rota, office moves or new systems where possible.
- Design support around the work: clear briefs, task sequencing, quieter spaces, remote options, breaks, buddying, written feedback or flexible start times can be more useful than generic awareness.
- Treat a request for clarity as a sign of good planning, not resistance. Review support after the change rather than waiting for a problem.

ONE QUESTION WORTH KEEPING What can we change in the environment, information or process so this person does not have to carry the whole burden of adapting?

My Transition Plan

Complete this alone or with someone you trust. Use words, drawings, symbols, photos or a voice note. Keep only the details that are useful to you.

MY NAME OR PREFERRED NAME <i>I want to be called ...</i> _____	DATE <i>Today is ...</i> _____	PERSON SUPPORTING THIS PLAN <i>Optional</i> _____
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THE CHANGE I AM PREPARING FOR

What is changing? Where and when will it happen?

WHAT I ALREADY KNOW

People, places, times, route, routine, tasks or rules I understand already.

WHAT I NEED TO FIND OUT

Questions I need answered before the change.

WHAT MAY FEEL DIFFICULT

Think about people, uncertainty, sensory details, transport, waiting, tasks, communication or anything else.

My Transition Plan

Part two: what helps, who will do what, and what we will review after the change.

THINGS THAT HELP ME FEEL READY

Information, people, items, routines, sensory tools, movement, food, quiet, choice, reminders or other supports.

MY FIRST-DAY / FIRST-SHIFT PLAN

How I arrive, who I check in with, first task, breaks, leaving/re-entry and the end of the day.

IF I FEEL OVERWHELMED

What I can say, show or do. Who will help? Where can I go? What should others avoid doing?

WHO WILL DO WHAT

Name the action and the person responsible. Example: 'Teacher sends photo of the new classroom - Friday.'

REVIEW DATE

We will check this plan on ...

WHAT WORKED

Keep ...

WHAT NEEDS CHANGING

Change ...

Parent / teacher transition checklist

Use this one-page check before a school change. Adapt it for nursery, primary, secondary, college, a new class or a return after absence.

Information and planning ☐ The learner has been told about the change in a clear, accessible way. ☐ We have named what is changing and what will stay the same. ☐ We have answered the learner's questions honestly, including what is not known yet. ☐ We have agreed who will be involved and what may be shared.	People and place ☐ The learner knows key adults, classroom/room, toilets, quiet place and collection point. ☐ A short visit, photo, video or map has been offered if useful. ☐ Travel, arrival, uniform, food, medication and collection arrangements have been checked. ☐ There is a named adult for the first days and a backup if they are absent.
Support and regulation ☐ The learner's communication preferences and successful supports are known. ☐ Sensory details and regulation tools have been planned without shame or punishment. ☐ The learner knows how to ask for help, a break or a change of plan. ☐ The first days allow time to learn routines before extra demands are added.	Review and partnership ☐ Family and school have a simple, two-way communication plan. ☐ We will check in after day one, week one and again after settling in. ☐ The learner will be asked what worked and what made things harder. ☐ Adjustments will be reviewed, not removed automatically because the learner appears settled.

QUICK CHECK Can the learner answer: What is happening? When? Who can help me? What can I do if it feels too much? If not, the plan needs one more conversation.

Learner's preferred support / key notes:

Evidence-informed resources

This toolkit is informed by transition-planning research and clinical guidance. The sources below are starting points, not a claim that one model fits every African setting. Research in this area has limitations in geography, participant diversity and lived-experience involvement; adapt every plan with the person, family and local context.

Nuske, H. J., et al. (2019). Broken bridges - new school transitions for students with autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review on difficulties and strategies for success. *Autism*, 23(2), 306-325. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318754529>

[Open source](#)

Fontil, L., Gittens, J., Beaudoin, E., & Sladeczek, I. E. (2020). Barriers to and facilitators of successful early school transitions for children with autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities: A systematic review. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50, 1866-1881. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-03938-w> [Open source](#)

Chandaroo, R., Strnadova, I., & Cumming, T. M. (2018). A systematic review of the involvement of students with autism spectrum disorder in the transition planning process: Need for voice and empowerment. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 83, 8-17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2018.07.011> [Open source](#)

White, L. M., Adams, D., Simpson, K., & Malone, S. A. (2025). Transitioning on from secondary school for autistic students: A systematic review. *Autism in Adulthood*, 7(4), 386-402. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2023.0193> [Open source](#)

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: diagnosis and management (NG87). Includes environmental modifications and consideration of education and employment support. [Open source](#)

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Autism spectrum disorder in under 19s: support and management (CG170). Includes preparation for transition to adult services. [Open source](#)

Further practical starting points

Ask your local school, employer, health professional, disabled people's organisation, autism/ADHD support group or community service what accessible support already exists. A good plan joins formal support with the person's lived knowledge; it does not assume that an imported resource is automatically a fit.