

MANAGING CHANGE AND EXPECTATIONS



Change is an unavoidable part of life, yet many neurodivergents struggle with deviations from the plans. While there are many reasons a person might struggle with change it often involves a sense of confusion and distress at now facing uncertainty and moving away from the known. Planning for change and helping manage expectations can reduce distress and ease transitions.



CHANGE CAN BE HARDER TO MANAGE WHEN:

- You struggle to predict what will happen next or what could happen next.
- You may not understand the concept of danger and the associated risks and consequences.
- You struggle to engage in imaginative play and activities, and find it hard to picture the unknown or new.
- You have difficulty with skills that help prepare for change and plan for the future.
- You find it hard to cope in new or unfamiliar situations.



THE PROS & CONS OF STRUCTURE & ROUTINE

Creating structures and routines are often a first line tool in managing expectations and helping participants to regulate themselves throughout an activity. They can do this through guiding the participants from one stage to the next and this will often work very well - provided you can avoid any changes or deviations along the way.

Having a routine or structure that is too rigid, or not helping build in ways to cope with change can end up backfiring on even the most well intended. To avoid this the aim is to create enough structure or routine to form a framework for what to expect while over time adding in plans for likely issues that may arise.



HELP THEM NAVIGATE CHANGE

You can help guide participants through periods of change in a number of ways. While it can be hard to predict the unpredictable there are ways to help build in some contingencies and strategies to help participants navigate potentially challenging situations.

Some ideas to help in navigating change:

- Inform them early if plans are potential going to be changed. Consider having a basic guideline for commonly experienced changes such as weather, no-shows, or changes in locations (home vs away games).
- Help participants to prepare for change through the provision of supported rehearsal.
- Consider the use of visual aids and resources to help provide information as these may be better received in times of distress.



AVOID PROMISES AND GUARANTEES

While it may seem like this could reduce distress it often backfires over time. It is all too easy to forget a promise made in a tense moment; unfortunately, when the participant remembers, and expectations are not met, it can break down trust.

There are a few ways around this and the approach you use will depend on your own communication style and their processing and comprehension skills. Try using less specific language like “maybe” or “perhaps”. You might also find it helpful to explain what factors may affect outcomes such as, “if the ground is still wet by 10 am the game is cancelled and we will all go home”.



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