Support Through Staffing Changes

Some autistic people may find calm in the predictability of having the same person at their education establishment every day, and when this changes anxiety and worry can increase.

We have put together some things to think about when supporting the person through these often-unavoidable times:

- **Understanding**
  Ensure that the key staff understand the impact changes like these will have, making sure a note is entered into their record for you to be informed in light of any changes so that you can work together in the best interests of your family member.

- **Keep informed**
  Be proactive in finding out what the change specifically involves and timeframes relating to it. For example, you might know that your child's support worker is leaving but might not have been given any information about the staff member replacing them. Have conversations to get all the details as far in advance as possible.

- **Prepare for the change**
  If you think the person can cope - prepare them as far as possible for the day of change. Describe exactly what the change is, use clear language and give time to process. You could try and mark a countdown on a calendar. On the day of change ensure the person has familiar/comfort objects with them to support them in case they feel anxious.

- **Work with the education provision to ensure a good transition**
  Check that the previous worker has passed on all relevant details, no matter how small they feel they are at the time. If it is a keyworker that is leaving it is likely that they will have a really detailed knowledge about your child/family member, it is vital that this is shared before the person leaves.

- **Use visuals**
  Visual supports can be great in aiding you when explaining and describing changes as well as helping the autistic person to sequence things in their minds. You may decide to use visual stories with photographs of the new staff member. Some autistic people may need or like photographs of their old worker to keep as a memory.

- **Meet with the new staff member if possible**

  As a parent/carer you will want to ensure the new staff member is fully aware of your person's needs, interests etc. You could create an 'all about me' profile to share with the new staff member. It may help the autistic person if you bring them along to the meeting with you.

- **Check in on the person**

  It is likely that the person may feel anxious about the impending change but might not feel comfortable expressing this, look out for signs of anxiety and provide opportunities for expressing how they are feeling. You could create a worry box where they can post any concerns they have.

- **Be positive about the change**

  It is to be expected that you will also be feeling anxious about the change because of the impact it may have on your person, however, try and remain calm and positive

- **Encourage and practice flexibility**

  Staff changes can sometimes be unexpected, for example, due to sickness. During periods like this there is no time to prepare; if the person is flexible in this situation it could help. Teach flexible thinking skills in natural settings.

- **Build emotional regulation time into the person's routine**

  If the person is struggling to deal with the change build in regular emotional regulation strategies into their routine, such as sensory input, time on their special interests, mindfulness techniques and exercise.

- **Time**

  Be aware that the person may still feel anxious about the change for a long time afterwards; support them through this and recognise that these are very real feelings.