Tips for Moving House

Most people consider home their safe place, so it isn't surprising that moving house is rated as one of the most stressful events in a person's life. For autistic people a house move can have a profound effect on their wellbeing as this safe place is no longer available and they have to make sense of a new reality.

We have put together some things to think about before, during and after a house move.

Before:

- **Be aware of your own stresses and how these may impact on others** - if your stress is picked up they may start to sense that the move is a negative thing.

- **Use visuals** - these can be helpful for lots of things in the moving process. One thing they can support you with is explaining what will happen, in what order, as autistic people can struggle to sequence things in their mind. You could show this by using a visual timetable. You could use a calendar to count down the days. Or you may want to use visual stories with photos of the new house, rooms, garden etc. Try and break the move down into small steps.

- **Validate feelings** - let them know that it's ok to feel worried, scared or anxious about the change.

- **Give them as much control over their new environment as possible** - offer support so involvement in making the new house their home is possible. For example, can you create a drawing of the layout of the house and ask where things should go.

- **Allow plenty of time to prepare** -it may be best to talk about the house move at the earliest opportunity, so everyone has as much time as possible to prepare. You should consider making several visits to the house before the move to help with familiarisation. However, for some autistic people it may be better to tell them closer to the time, so they have less time to overthink and worry about the move.

- **Explore the local area** - before the move look at the fun things to do nearby - helping create positivity around the move. You could spend a day out in the local area before the move.

- **If appropriate, talk about the reasons behind the move** - you could explain how the move is going to be positive for the family. For example, "we are moving so we have a big garden to play on our trampoline."

- **Acknowledge the things that will stay the same** - this can help promote feelings of security.

- **Plan your first night in the new house** - make this fun and exciting. You could have a takeaway of their choice and movie night or a games night.

- **Friendships** - it is important for friendships to not be affected where possible. Make sure you get all of their friends contact details so they can keep in touch.

- **Create a memories box - c**ollect memories from your old home, this can help them to move on. This may be something decorative from the old house or photos of the old house.

- **Look at storybooks together - t**here are some useful books out there that can help talk explain moving house

During:

- **Moving day** - this is likely to be the most stressful day of the whole experience. Think about whether it's best for the person to be involved or not. For some people seeing their old home taken apart and moved somewhere else may just be too much, but for others seeing the process will help with the transition.

- **Do not throw away familiar items during the move** - to you the item may be worthy of a trip to the bin, but for someone else it could be the one thing that brings about a sense of security.

- **Welcome questions** - encourage the expression of worries and allow questions to be asked about anything they are concerned about.

After:

- **Acknowledge that time may be needed to get used to new surroundings** - throughout this time, you may see changes in behaviour like increased stimming or changes to sleep patterns. It is important to validate feelings and offer support to feel safe and secure. Where possible try to keep routine the same as before the move.