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Tips for Moving with a Child on the Spectrum

Moving can be daunting for anyone, but it can be especially challenging for families with a child who has autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Disruptions and uncertainty are often difficult for children with ASD, and adjusting to new routines takes extra time, but there are ways to anticipate those challenges and create a safe, supportive environment. Here are strategies you can use before, during, and after the move that will help make it as stress-free as possible.

Be proactive about preparation

First, give your child plenty of advance warning and time to adjust to the idea of moving. Before introducing the specifics of your own move, make sure they understand the concept of moving itself. You could check out a library book about moving and all its stages. Then help your child imagine where you're going by using pictures and [visual aids](#), such as photos of their new room and neighborhood. These can be especially helpful learning tools for children with ASD.

When choosing a home, keep safety and your child's particular needs in mind. Look for [design features](#) that are helpful for people with ASD. For example, if your child has noise sensitivities, make a quiet neighborhood a priority. Consider features such as quiet heating and air conditioning, as well as appliances that do not hum or buzz. Even if it isn't possible to view homes in person, [virtual tours](#) and video chats can be a minimally disruptive way to include your child in the process and evaluate whether a house is a good fit for you and your family.

Create a relaxing 'safe zone'

Because some children with ASD are highly sensitive to their environments and can be easily [overstimulated](#), it's important to carve out a safe place where your child can relax and feel comfortable. On moving day, pack up his or her room last and unpack it first. Consider making a sensory [comfort kit](#) with tools for addressing potential challenges (such as [noise-canceling headphones](#) or a weighted blanket).

If you hire a moving company and anticipate a great deal of loud noise and chaos on moving day, consider asking a trusted neighbor, friend, or family member (whom your child knows well) to look after him or her for at least part of the day. People who know your child's unique needs and habits can create some continuity and a feeling of safety by taking them to a familiar place. There are plenty of fun and relaxing [activities](#) tailored to children on the autism spectrum that can keep them busy for hours on end.

Take your time

Children with ASD can take a bit longer to [adapt to change](#). Give yourself as much time as possible with each stage of the move itself – the house hunt, the sale, packing, traveling, unpacking, and settling in. The more gradually you approach each of these stages, the more likely that the transition will go smoothly and your child will settle in with ease.

A surefire way to combat the stress of moving is to take frequent breaks to relax and enjoy time together. If the stress level rises for your child and problem behaviors start to emerge, carve out a bit of time to enjoy activities that you know will make him or her laugh, smile, and come out of his or her shell. [Play](#) is an important part of learning, adapting, and coping with life's stressors. Factor in these 'fun breaks' when you are figuring out a timeline for your move.

Because the requirements and preferences of people on the autism spectrum vary so widely, it's important to take a systematic and gradual approach to moving. This can help you not only find a new home that suits your family's needs but also help your child successfully cope with the stress of moving and thrive in a new environment. No one knows your child better than you do, and the way you approach moving can be sensitive to their unique needs – making it as safe and fun as possible.