**Transition challenges**

**with**

**Autism**

**Case study**

**From a parent’s perspective**

Any form of transition causes anxiety and panic. This relates to even moving from one room to another, dressing, leaving the house, moving from home to school. It can take up to two hours to leave the hours and to do this careful preparation has to take place first. Typically, this begins the night before. A schedule to list what is coming, clothes that will be worn, sometimes visuals can be used to support this process, but this can also be a trigger, so it takes careful management of the right approach; based on emotional regulation and current state at the time. Additionally, just because something has been successful previously, it does not follow that this happens every time, as it is entirely dependent on their emotional state and levels of anxiety. In fact, the mere demand/pressure of having to live up to this expectation is often a stressor of its own. Intrinsic demands can often cause the most emotional response as it is something they want to do but is just unable to.

So, when you consider the enormity of moving from primary to secondary school, a transition support plan is integral to any future success. The process we have gone through to even name a school place has been exhaustive and that is in part due to the lack of recognition of their Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) and the anomaly that this can present. Their cognitive abilities have always taken precedence over their social, emotional and communication needs. It has even been suggested that it would be a disservice not to provide them with a mainstream school place when in fact, without a provision to support their mental health and a clear understanding of PDA and how this presents, they would never feel and maintain the emotional regulation to access anything offered in a mainstream setting. It is this false perception that is formed when academic ability is prioritised over everything else, and it is a narrow and false view of an individual’s needs.

Sadly, they are currently unable to access the mainstream primary setting due to the trauma this triggers. The aim is that once the secondary provision has been agreed they will begin an enhanced transition plan this academic year which will enable them to develop a sense of belonging and connection to the setting and some staff members. Trust, belonging, and acceptance are the fundamental element of any child in feeling safe at school. This is particularly prominent for those with any SEND. There will only be one opportunity to get the foundations of these new relationships right. The first experience of something provides the base for all future experiences to develop from. If something is negative, they will never be able to move past it.

The barriers in transitioning to secondary education will be beginning relationships with staff who have not yet understood the complexity of their needs and how to support them positively. They will not yet know or recognise the impact of their interactions. We hope that the provision will enable them to meet a wider mix of peers particularly other neurodiverse children.

The positive support has come from the Primary head who is also the SENDco. He has been invested in their needs and he has always championed them. As a parent who has worked in education as a teacher, SENDco and now within the local authority the process of trying to access support is exhausting and demoralising. Parents are still not being heard enough and SEND provision is at breaking point. We hope that our child will find their tribe at secondary school and feel supported and accepted and celebrated for the amazing person they are which is what they deserve.