

Managing home time

Background information

- For some children with additional needs home time can be a difficult part of their day. This could be due to sensory difficulties, difficulties with their ability to process language or difficulties around social interactions and 'flexibility of thought'.

Strategies

Sensory difficulties

- The hustle and bustle of a busy cloakroom can be quite difficult for some children with additional needs to manage. The child may become distressed, refuse to follow the instruction (to avoid the situation) or become agitated which may result in less positive behaviours. Could the child be taken to another area by an additional adult whilst the other children get ready for home? Could they access a calming box of favourite resources/fidget toys whilst they are waiting for their friends to get ready?
- There will usually be a lot of adults waiting outside to collect their children. It will be noisy and visually stimulating. Some children with additional needs will find this overwhelming and may become distressed. We may see changes in their behaviour because of this raised level of anxiety. Try to think of ways that the child could avoid this big group of people. Could they be collected from a different entrance? Could their parent collect them a few minutes earlier? This will help to limit the sensory input that they are receiving and lessen their anxiety, helping the child to remain calm.

Language difficulties

- Children with language difficulties will find it tricky to follow extended instructions. They may only pick up on 1 word in a sentence. If this word is 'mummy' they may become upset when they are not able to go immediately to their parent. We can support these children by using visual prompts and giving short and simple instructions that are broken down into single steps. For example, it may help to use a simple photo schedule showing the steps of home time – Coat, bag, wait, mummy. The child can then use this prompt to better understand the stages of home time.

Social difficulties

- Children who have difficulties in social interactions and social imagination (or flexibility of thought) find it tricky to read situations and predict what might be about to happen. They do not pick up on the same non-verbal cues that their peers might. They may not yet understand that other children also have needs thoughts and feelings. They find routine comforting and changes to this can cause distress. We need to make sure that we support these children so that they understand exactly what will be happening and prepare them for any changes from the normal routine. For example, when a different adult is in charge during home time, try to make sure that the same routine and language around home time is used. This will help to reduce the anxiety for children who have difficulties in this area, helping them to remain calm and reducing the risk of any negative behaviour. The child might find waiting in a line or for their turn difficult because of this lack of understanding of the needs of others. If so could the child go out to their parent first?

Useful websites & further reading

- <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour/sensory-world.aspx>
- https://www.riverside.haringey.sch.uk/Admissions/Flexibility_of_Thought_Guidance_March_17.pdf