

# Back-to-School Checklist for Families of Students with ASD

## (Grades 7–12)

### ☐ Practice locker routines and class transitions

- **Why:** Multiple classrooms, crowded hallways, and time limits can be overwhelming.
- **Examples:**
  - Practice opening/closing combination locks at home.
  - Use a color-coded system for binders/folders (e.g., red = math, blue = science).
  - Walk through the school to rehearse the path between classes.

### ☐ Set up an organizational system for homework and materials

- **Why:** Executive functioning challenges can make organization difficult.
- **Examples:**
  - Use a daily planner (paper or digital) with visual reminders.
  - Break down big projects into smaller steps with due dates.
  - Backpack check each night: “Binders? Homework? Lunch? Devices charged?”

### ☐ Create a social story or checklist for navigating the cafeteria and break times

- **Why:** Unstructured times are often the most stressful.
- **Examples:**
  - Social story: “At lunch, I can sit with classmates. If I feel overwhelmed, I can ask to go to the resource room.”
  - Identify “safe spaces” in the school (library, resource center, guidance office).

### ☐ Review self-advocacy and communication strategies

- **Why:** Older students benefit from learning to express needs directly.
- **Examples:**

- Role-play asking a teacher: “Can I have more time on this test?” or “Can I sit at the front?”
- Create a laminated “help card” to hand to teachers if verbal communication is hard.
- Encourage practice with email writing: “Dear Mr. Smith, I was absent yesterday. Could you share the homework assignment?”

#### □ **Prepare a one-page student profile (student-led if possible)**

- **Why:** Middle/high school teachers have many students and limited time. A profile helps them understand key needs quickly.
- **Examples (student adds input):**
  - *Strengths:* “Good at computers, love history.”
  - *Challenges:* “Too much noise makes me anxious.”
  - *Supports:* “I focus better with headphones, I like written instructions.”
  - *Goals:* “I want to join one club this year.”

#### □ **Practice independence in daily living skills**

- **Why:** Middle/high school is a bridge to adulthood—building life skills is as important as academics.
- **Examples:**
  - Packing gym clothes and managing a hygiene routine.
  - Handling money for lunch/snacks.
  - Using public transit or walking routes if appropriate.

#### □ **Plan for sensory regulation throughout the day**

- **Why:** Older students may mask stress, but still need supports.
- **Examples:**
  - Pack discreet tools (small putty, pencil topper chews, noise-cancelling earbuds).
  - Agree on signals with staff for when a break is needed.
  - Identify a calming routine (deep breaths, listening to music, journaling).

#### □ **Build in decompression time after school**

- **Why:** Long days of social and academic demands require recovery.
- **Examples:**

- 30 minutes of quiet time before homework.
- Physical activity like biking, basketball, or yoga.
- Time on special interests (art, gaming, reading) as a reward.

#### **☐ Celebrate independence and effort, not just results**

- **Why:** Encouragement builds resilience and self-esteem.
- **Examples:**
  - Praise: “You emailed your teacher on your own—that’s awesome self-advocacy.”
  - Allow small rewards for meeting organizational goals (like finishing a week with all homework turned in).
  - Highlight progress, not perfection.

**Tip for Parents:** Encourage your teen to be part of preparing the checklist. Giving them ownership helps with motivation and transition into more independence.