

The views of young people with an autism spectrum disorder on their experience of transition to secondary school.

The experience of transition from primary to secondary school is regarded as being particularly challenging for children who have a diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The research in this area has identified that additional support during this period has been beneficial, however the dominant voice has been given to the parents and professionals. This qualitative exploratory study offers an opportunity for others to gain a greater understanding of the process through the constructs and perceptions of the child with an ASD. It also served to gain information around the development and use of skills that are associated with self-advocacy. Self-advocacy is often regarded as a skill that contribute to successful outcomes in life.

The study involved five Year 7 children who had joined one of two mainstream secondary schools with one local authority in England. The data was gathered through the use of semi-structured interviews and analysed using inductive thematic analysis.

The findings of the study indicated that a sense of belonging was valued by the participants and stressed the importance of having positive relationships. Whilst there were some signs that the children were able to express their needs to others, there was an assumption that the adults may take on the role as advocate. Relationships were a perceived area of difficulty, with some children also reporting experiences of being bullied in both the primary and secondary settings. These difficulties were attributed to having an ASD or feeling they were different to their peers. There were also indications that the interaction of the systems around the child were pivotal to the experience of the transition process.

In this small scale study, the participants reported a generally felt that their experience of transition had been successful with all the pupils reporting feeling positive about their secondary school.

The implications of this study suggest that there could be a role for educational psychologists in supporting the schools, families and the children with ASD. It is possible that working at a systems level could improve the development of skills that would enhance

the ability to self-advocate; thus increasing self-awareness, resiliency and a sense of belonging.

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