

FOR FAMILIES AND SUPPORTERS OF STUDENTS WITH ASD

Most families and supporters of students with ASD have been very involved in every aspect of their lives, from support with transitions, academics, to time management and organization, social interactions, and leisure activities.

Up until now, as families and supporters, you have often done a fair amount of the advocacy for your students. Watching your student transition to university can be both an exciting time, but also a time of considerable anxiety. It may be hard to let go and trust other people to step in and support your student in their transition. It often takes time to let go of the reins and put your trust in others, as your student moves towards greater independence.

It is a particularly difficult time now as your student begins university in the midst of a pandemic with so many unknowns. The lifting of restrictions and entry to campus for many brings a sense of anxiety and unease. Some students may be very keen to engage with university life, whereas for others, it comes with a great deal of uncertainty and feelings of being overwhelmed.

Families and supporters play a key role in a student's transition, not acting for them, but being there next to them like a "guide on the side" while they navigate the transition. In this light, the student is the primary contact for all decisions and communication with the University.

Students with ASD shared some of the following difficulties in transitioning to university. You might want to talk to your student about:

Academic	Social/Personal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Navigating the online environment and technology used at U of T.• Time management and organizational skills, e.g.: submitting assignments on time.• Understanding the requirements of courses e.g.: Attending lectures, completing readings, knowing when assignments are due, etc.• Coping with the workload and level of difficulty of the courses.• Staying focused on studies, and not getting discouraged.• Group work and trouble-shooting working with others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Making friends and keeping friends. Many connections from high school are lost and it can be very lonely at first.• Managing money and learning to budget.• Living independently in a new environment and completing activities of daily living, e.g.: living arrangements, remembering to eat, and personal hygiene.• Mastering public transit and navigating physical layout of campus, perhaps for the first time.• Navigating a new culture and/or city.• Finding ways to relax and reduce stress.

What might you notice as a family/supporter?

- Increased stress levels
- Reduced energy levels
- Change in self-care/ hygiene
- Sensory overload from large class sizes
- Reduced class attendance/engagement in University life
- Uncertainty about the structure of the course or where to find information
- Anxiety about grades being lower than in the past
- Struggles with peer interactions and navigating group work process
- Difficulty providing information on due dates and keeping up with course demands

What can you do?

- Help your student find the most suitable living arrangement based on your knowledge of your student's needs. For some students, the best fit might be living on campus, while for others staying at home, at least in the first year, might be the most appropriate option.
- Guide the student, once they have accepted their offer of admission, to regularly check the many emails they will receive from the University. These emails contain important steps they must take, e.g.: setting up U of T

email, registering for courses, paying fees and information on important deadlines.

- Ensure registration with [Accessibility Services](#), which is required to receive academic accommodations.
- Encourage registered students to book an appointment with the [front desk](#) (accessibility.services@utoronto.ca or 416-978-8060) to speak with their Accessibility Advisor around accommodations or access support through their health care practitioner for health-related needs.
- Familiarize yourself with the [resources](#) that are available at U OF T:
 - [Parents and Families of U of T Students Webpage](#)
 - [Accessibility Services Handbook](#)
 - [U of T Newly Admitted Students Checklist Page](#)
- Encourage your student to register for [Orientation Programs](#), at their College or Faculty, and also at Accessibility Services. Our [Moving Forward](#) Summer Transition Program, is a workshop series that discusses strategies for managing life in and out of the classroom, at St. George campus, and how to gain university-level academic skills and meet a community of peers.
- Encourage your student to read the weekly Accessibility Services Newsletter sent over their U of T email throughout the school year.