



Spring Transitions & Autism:

Understanding Change, Regulation, and Support

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Spring Onset

- Longer Daylight Hours
- Temperature Swings
- Seasonal Allergies
- Schedule Changes
- Increased Stimulation



Spring Fatigue

- Sleep disturbance for 1–3+ weeks after DST
- Increased irritability and emotional reactivity
- Reduced focus, organization, and productivity
- Lower frustration tolerance
- Feeling “off,” tired, or dysregulated without a clear cause



Autism-specific Lens

- Sensory processing differences
- Difficulty with transitions
- Executive Dysfunction
- Sleep-wake cycle disruption



Spring = multiple micro-changes happening at once!

What Changes in Schools During Spring?

- Academic & Schedule Shifts
- Routine & Environment Changes
- Staff & System-Level Shifts
- Preparation for Year-end Transitions



Impact on PRIMARY Learners

Common Observed Changes

- Increased meltdowns or emotional dysregulation
- Changes in sleep or early waking
- Sensory defensiveness (clothes, shoes, sweat, pollen)
- Regression in toileting, routines, or communication
- Increased stimming or withdrawal



Why This Happens (Developmental Lens)

- Limited self-awareness of body changes
- Reliance on predictable routines
- Less developed emotional language
- Sensory systems still organizing

Practical Supports - PRIMARY

At Home

- Visual countdowns to seasonal changes
- Adjust to sensory needs
- Earlier bedtime buffer (even 15–20 minutes)
- Collaborate with the school



At School

- Visual schedule updates
- Calm-down corner refresh
- Movement breaks built in
- Pre-teaching for outdoor changes

Impact on SECONDARY Learners

Common Observed Changes

- Increased irritability or shutdowns
- Anxiety spikes
- Sleep deprivation
- Resistance to school or demands
- Emotional outbursts at home



Why This Happens (Adolescent Lens)

- Executive Functioning
- Hormonal shifts
- Increased social expectations
- Heightened self-awareness
- Less tolerance for perceived loss of control
- Masking

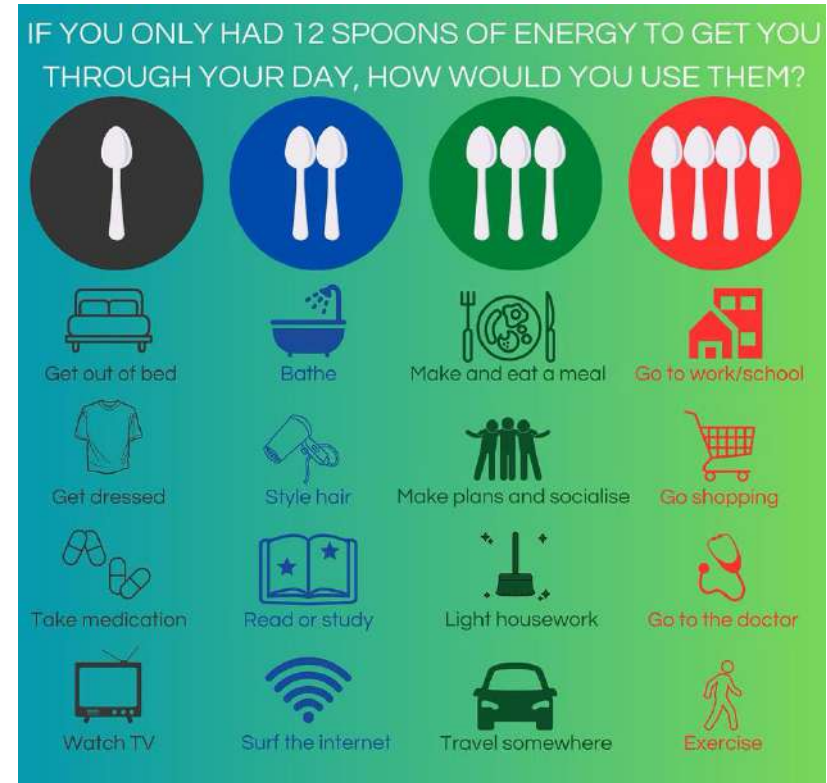
Practical Supports - SECONDARY

At Home

- Spoons Theory – Christine Miserandino
- Normalize “low-energy days”
- Reduce non-essential demands
- Collaborative problem solving
- Executive Functioning Tools

At School

- Boundaries for socializing
- Predictability around testing
- Reduced sensory load when possible
- Permission for breaks without penalty
- Occupational Therapy toolbox



Universal Strategies that Help Both Age Groups

Regulation First, Learning Second

- Behavior ≠ defiance
- Look for patterns, not isolated incidents
- Adjust expectations

High-Impact Supports

- Visuals & previews
- Movement regulation
- Sensory accommodations
- Emotional validation
- Consistent routines with flexible delivery

EMOTION REGULATION FOR AUTISM



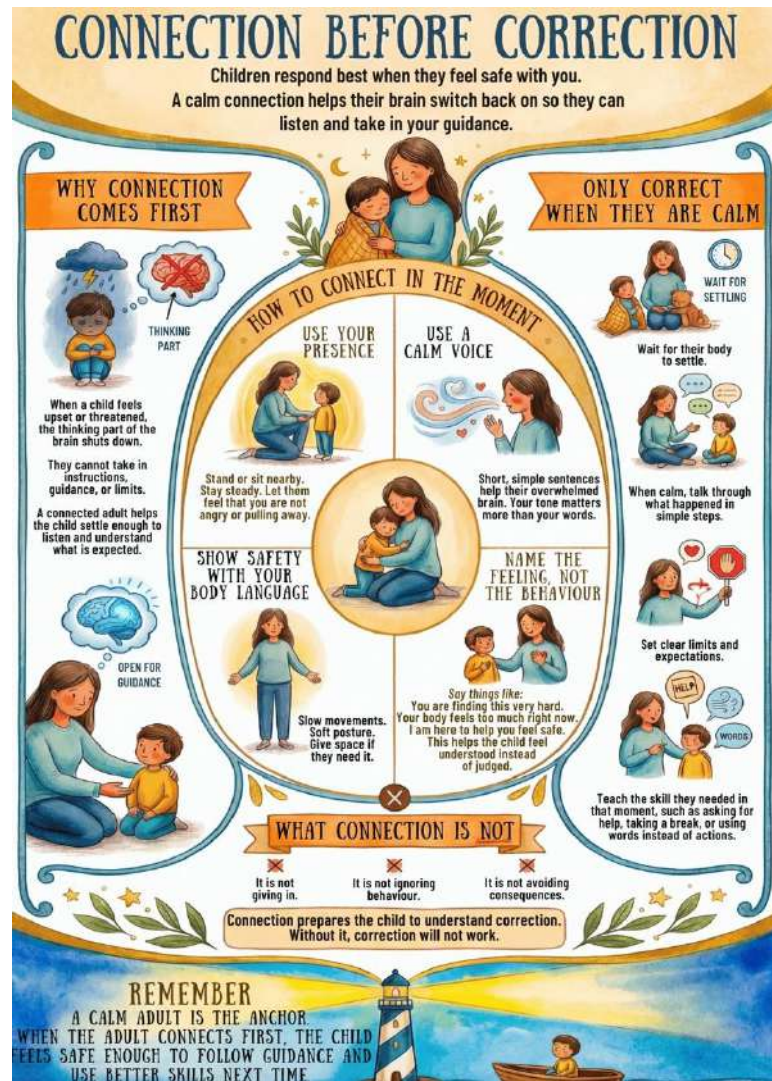
From Compliance to Compassion

Compliance-Focused Lens

- “They should be able to handle this”
- Prioritizes obedience and performance
- Responds after behavior escalates
- Uses consequences to control behavior
- Often increases anxiety and shutdown

Compassion-Focused Lens

- “What is their nervous system communicating?”
- Prioritizes regulation before expectations
- Responds before escalation
- Uses connection, predictability, and support
- Builds trust, safety, and long-term skills



Spring Doesn't Change the Child— *It Changes What They Need*

What to Remember:

- Seasonal change impacts *every nervous system*
- For autistic children, spring *brings layered regulation challenges*
- Behavior is communication, not defiance
- Support & predictability *reduce escalation*
- Compassion creates safety and growth

*What is one expectation
I can soften this spring without
lowering growth?*

Respond with understanding, and you give children the safety to thrive.

Discussion

Thank you for joining us in empowering parents and strengthening families — one home at a time



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