



## Ask Cathy...

*An Open Dialogue With A Mother and Special Needs Architect*

**Q:** With school about to start, can you advise how I might prepare my young daughter with ASD so that she is ready to return to a regular routine?

**A:** I would recommend a few things. Getting your daughter into a predictable routine and preparing her environment to support that routine are the best first two steps. You may want to use a wall clock, a song, and several strategic signs mounted in her room, her bathroom, and around the house.

Even before school starts, if you can encourage her to select her clothes for the next day the night before, this will help with her routine. In the morning, you may want to play a favorite song or two to provide her with a sense of time to brush her teeth and engage her in the preparation of her breakfast.

Consider making a “25 days before school starts” calendar, just like a Christmas advent calendar. This will help create excitement about her first day. You could also invite a few of her classmates to the house a couple weeks before school starts to help her get excited about re-establishing her social network.

Finally, you may want to coordinate with the school to set up a visit before the school year starts. Meeting her new teacher and becoming familiar with her new classroom should help your daughter with any anxiety she may be feeling.

**Q:** I struggle with taking my son to the store to purchase new clothes. The crowds, noise, chaos, and harsh lighting can be overwhelming for him. With school starting soon, I need to take him shopping. Can you recommend how I can make this easier for him?

**A:** First, I would suggest determining the best store environment for him. You may consider contacting the store manager to discuss the best time of the day when the crowds are minimal and, if necessary, request that the

level of lighting be lowered in the area you plan to shop.

Second, I would recommend preparing your son by trying on his clothes at home first. This will give you an opportunity to discuss how he is growing and determine what his new size might be before you get to the store. If head phones help your son, allow him to wear them.

Lastly, explain that after shopping, you two will do something special. The prospect

of a special reward might provide the motivation he needs to manage the shopping process. Of course, with online shopping, you can purchase items that don't need to be tried on for size—like socks and T-shirts—without ever leaving home. ◀

**SPECIAL NOTE:** Cathy's responses come straight from her own personal experiences. It's important to note that each child on the spectrum is unique and will have their own set of needs.



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### CATHY PURPLE CHERRY, AIA, LEED AP...

...A special needs architect and founder of Purposeful Architecture, Cathy Purple Cherry is the mother of an adult son on the autism spectrum and sibling of a Down syndrome brother. Through her lifelong interactions and observations of her brother and son, she has an acute awareness of relevant triggers and environmental issues that impact individuals with disabilities. In addition to the numerous articles she has written on the topic, Cathy speaks nationally on Purposeful design needs that support academic and therapeutic needs of individuals with disabilities. She engages her audiences and enables them to consider design applications and concepts that enhance their practice with respect to environments designed to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. She is tireless in her efforts to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities through Purposeful Architecture™. For more information, visit [www.purposefularchitecture.com](http://www.purposefularchitecture.com). ◀