



‘A resource pack to support students in special schools and special classes to navigate the social environment post COVID’.

The National Council for Special Education  
Dublin City University



The following resource pack can be used as a tool to help your students navigate the social environment. It will help you to:

- i) plan and prepare
- ii) communicate the plan to your students
- iii) support your student's as they take the necessary steps
- iv) use the social environment to support core skills taught in the classroom

The planning resources included will support students of different ages and skill levels across the various settings. They are intended to help students who might require some additional support moving to different aspects of the social environment, in particular after the experience of COVID.

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## Supporting students to navigate the social environment: an information document

### GETTING READY AND GOING FOR A WALK

This information based document is an example of how the skills required to navigate the journey into a social environment can be broken down into manageable steps. This approach enables us to:

- 1) plan and prepare
- 2) identify steps that the students can complete
- 3) support the students as needed
- 4) build on steps

In this example, we take a look at the steps involved in getting ready to go for a walk. The same process can be used for any outing or activity you choose such as going to the play area in the classroom, school hall, or the local shop. Remember that deciding on where to go will be influenced by a range of factors such as any risk involved, staffing, the student's skill level, locations available to you and so on.

In the first section, we will think about what steps are involved in getting ready and going for a walk.

#### 1. Let's break the steps down

Getting ready to go outside:

- 1) Check my schedule
- 2) Wash my hands
- 3) Get my hat/bag
- 4) Line up at the classroom door

Going on the walk:

- 5) Walk with my friends
- 6) Cross the roads
- 7) Continue to walk with my friends

This example identifies seven steps but there may be others. These steps will be specific to your student and the circumstances involved. Typically, smaller steps are used for students who are having difficulty.

## 2. Preparing materials and communicating the message to your students

What materials do you need? We have divided this section up into different sections; materials you will need for getting ready and for communicating the message to your student; materials you will need during the activity.

Getting ready and communicating the message to your student

- Use your student's *first next board* or *visual schedule* to introduce a new picture or symbol for getting ready and going on a walk.
- Tell your student what these pictures / symbols mean. Help them to understand that they will be going on a walk with their peers later in the day.
- Reading a *visual story* might be useful for communicating this message to your student. Make sure to include the picture / symbol used on your first next board / visual schedule in your visual story / picture story.
- Have your student use their visual schedule just before they get ready for the walk.

Helping your student to navigate a social environment

- Some students will need a first next board to be shown to them as they start to make the journey.
- Students will need you to let them know the journey is about to happen by
  - a) telling them, "let's go to the... / It's time to...."
  - b) counting down "5, 4, 3, 2, 1" and or using a countdown strip or a timer
  - c) having them check their visual schedule / first then next board.
- If your student likes to carry a distractor such as a favourite toy or a transition object that helps them predict where they are going ensure that it is available at all times.

## 3. Things to consider

If your student is having difficulties it might be a good idea to:

- reconsider where you are going. Perhaps instead of the school yard go to a play area in another classroom or instead of going to the shops go on a walk around the school
- choose your student's favourite friends to accompany them
- pick a time of day when your student is generally settled
- make sure that your student doesn't feel like they are missing out on something happening in the classroom
- keep supports in place even when the going is good
- choose an alternative day but *always* try again
- provide reinforcement / reward for your student's best efforts such as a word of encouragement, a smile, a high five or a thumbs up.
- use your student's token board or reward / reinforcement system
- Consider a different reward. Keep this reward for the journey

- Use planning tools such as the supporting students to navigate the social environment checklist, creating a roadmap and supporting core skills templates provided in this resource pack or any other templates that you find helpful.
- Remember that all steps of the activity might not be completed on the first attempt. Practice small manageable steps with your student will help them to gradually build on their success.

#### 4. Using this approach to support the generalisation of core skills taught in the classroom

The example that we have just gone through in this information document involves getting ready for and going on a walk. All students, when they are in the social environment, will benefit from the opportunities to have fun and enjoy interactions with their peers and teachers. Students may also be ready to practise core skills that they have been taught in the classroom. Some students may be ready for those opportunities, whereas for others beginning to access the social environment might be enough for now but readiness to practice core skills will come after they have mastered the first step. Some core skills that you may want to consider practicing with your student in the social environment include:

- 1) communication skills such as expressing basic needs and wants
- 2) social skills such as turn taking
- 3) life skills such as crossing the road safely
- 4) leisure skills such as enjoying varied activities and experiences

Practising these core skills in settings outside the classroom like in the community or the home, is really important for many students who may initially use those skills only in the setting they were taught. To identify opportunities for core skills that would be suitable to target in the social environment, you might want to think about:

- 1) skills your student is working on in the classroom
- 2) skills that maximize your student's experience
- 3) priority skills that the student needs to improve wellbeing across social environments
- 4) supporting skills from core communication, social, life and leisure skill areas

We have prepared the 'supporting core skills in the social environment template' to help you identify opportunities for building on your student's core skills. You can also adapt resources included in this resource pack such as breaking down the steps involved in going on any outing or engaging in an activity as well as adapt supports such as the visual story provided in this pack.


## Supporting students to navigate the social environment checklist

Student name:

Date:

Getting ready	Yes	No	Not relevant
Have you selected where you want to go?			
Have you asked the right questions?			
Have you gathered the supports to prepare your students?			
Have you prepared your student and told them what is happening?			
Have you identified and planned to bring supports with you?			
Have you broken down the steps for your student?			
<b>On the journey</b>			
Have you used the right supports?			
Have you rewarded best efforts?			
Have you identified what extra reinforcers / rewards you can use if necessary?			
<b>At the destination</b>			
Have you identified core skills that you could support in the social environment?			
Have you identified supports that the student needs?			
Have you identified opportunities that the social environment might offer?			
Have you considered how learning in the social environment might be built upon?			

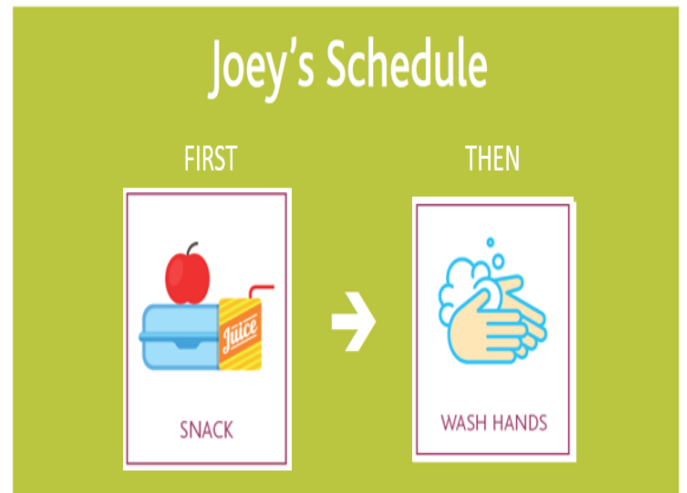
## Creating a roadmap template

<p>Name: _____</p> <p>Date: _____</p>  <p>My favourite friends are:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>My favourite items:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>My favourite activities are:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>I used to like visiting:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Now I like visiting:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>Things I might not like about trips include:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Things you can do to help me are:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>Where will we go?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>What will we bring?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>Supports that might help on trips include:</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Skills that I might work on</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>

## Getting ready to go for a walk



Today I am going for a walk.



First I will eat snack. Then I will wash my hands.



Next I will line up.

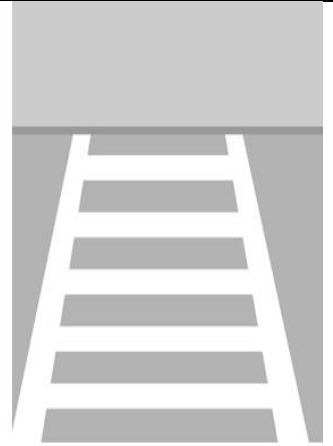


I will walk with my teacher and my friends around the school.





My teacher will help me to walk on the path.



I will hold my teachers hand to cross the road.  
It is ok to feel afraid.



I like to go for a walk. I will have lots of fun.

### Supporting core skills in the social environment template

Use the information that you have documented about your student to choose at least one communication, social, life and leisure skill to focus on in the social environment.

Who am I?	What am I working on in class?
<p>My name is:</p> <p>My favourite items / activities are:</p> <p>I most like to spend time with:</p> <p>Usually I communicate by:</p>	<p>Communication skills:</p> <p>Social skills:</p> <p>Life skills:</p> <p>Leisure skills:</p>
What will I work in the social environment	What support will I need? Please identify strategies that might help your student e.g., visual supports, modelling, hand over hand guidance
<p>Communication skills:</p> <p>Social skills:</p> <p>Life skills:</p> <p>Leisure skills:</p>	
What happens next?	
<p>Do I need more practice?</p> <p>Can I build on the skill?</p>	