

Preparing for the day

Many parents tell us that getting their children to school in the morning is one of the most stressful times of their day. The transitions involved in this time of day and the anxiety involved in thinking about what they are going to do that day can lead to concerning behaviour. This help sheet will give you some ideas to help make this a little easier for your child, and for you as well.

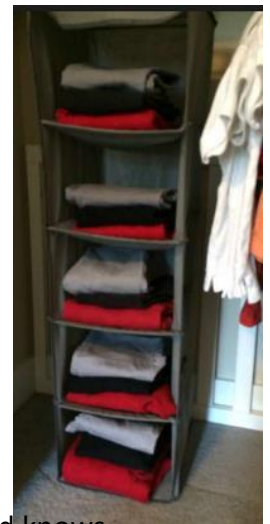
Routine

As we all know, children with ASD are often very reliant on routines. Trying to stick to a routine in the mornings could help your child to understand what is happening and be able to cooperate with what they are asked to do.

Structure

Try setting things up so they are really easy to understand and follow:

- Lay clothing out from left to right so your child works along the row of clothes.
- Breakfast utensils and cereal choices could be placed ready on the table.
- All the things which need to go in the school bag could be placed on the hall floor for your child to pack themselves, encouraging independence.



Visuals

Even if you always try to maintain the same routine, and you feel like your child knows what happens in the morning, it is possible that they still need reminders. Try using visuals to show the morning routine. Visuals are useful for

many reasons. They can increase independence (less verbal reminders as your child can see what to do next), they can reduce anxiety (yes, the day really is running as usual) and when there is a change to the routine, which will happen from time to time, you can show it on the schedule.

Almost all children with ASD will benefit from using visual strategies, but what this looks like will change from child to child, and for the same child as they get older. With very young children photographs of the actual objects, or of themselves



completing a task could be helpful. For older children or teenagers a simple written tick list may work better. You know your child, so think about which way of presenting visuals might work best for them. Do they have a Pokémon obsession, and would be more likely to accept visuals if they had pictures of Pikachu on them?

Other ideas which may help the morning routine to run more smoothly could include:

- having two copies of the schedule, one in the bedroom and one downstairs, so it can be checked easily wherever your child is
- tooth brushing visuals, timer etc
- pictures/a written list of the available breakfast options next to the bed, so that your child can begin thinking about what they would like when they first wake up
- A bag packing check list, to enable your child to begin developing these independence strategies

Transitions

The act of moving downstairs from the bedroom, from house to car, through the school gates and into the classroom could all cause difficulties for a child with ASD. Here are some ideas to help with this:

- Distractions/role play – “Quick! Spiderman needs your help in the kitchen! Let’s go!”
- ‘Rewards’ of a motivating activity once other things are done (e.g. iPad time while eating breakfast, if dressed, washed, hair brushed and downstairs)
- Transition objects (e.g. photo of mum and dad or family pet, ‘precious item’ of dad’s to look after during the day, something which smells of mum to keep in their school bag (e.g. scarf)
- Object of reference to confirm where they are going (e.g. a pencil or something else they associate with school on the way to school)

