

Creating Positive and Productive Routines at Home and School

In our daily lives, we all have preferred and non-preferred tasks and routines that we need to complete. Individuals with ASD can benefit greatly from routines as they add structure and predictability to the day's activities. However, when certain parts of a routine are difficult or frustrating, the entire routine can become aversive and lead to problematic behaviour. Building positive and productive routines at home and at school can increase the quality of daily interactions and the sense of accomplishment for children, parents and school staff.

Some routines difficult to establish because:

- They require specific skills.
- They are made up of a multitude of smaller tasks.
- The task is not motivating.
- There are competing events or activities.



10 Strategies for Creating More Positive and Productive Routines

1. Enjoy daily activities with your child.

By taking the time to enjoy daily activities with your child, you establish yourself as a reinforcer. In other words, your child is motivated to do the tasks you ask them to do, whether they are easy or difficult, because your presence helps make the task more pleasant.

2. Make routines fun.

Some routines are less motivating, but making small changes, such as playing music, singing a favorite song or creating a game or a contest, can help to be more fun.

3. Incorporate your child's interests into the routine.

If you can, try to incorporate things that your child likes into the routine like preferred pictures, images or objects.

4. Partner up!

To make routines more fun and less aversive, try completing routines with your child. You could split the task, so you do half of the routine for them and they do the other half.

5. Offer choices.

Allow your child to choose the order in which they want to perform the tasks, materials to use, where the routine will take place and when during the day it will be completed.

6. Combine routines.

If some routines are already established and are going well, use them as momentum and combine with another small task from a more difficult routine.

7. Use visual supports.

Use objects, pictures, cartoons or text to show your child the steps for what needs to be done. Be sure the visuals you use match your child's level of understanding.

8. Practice with easy and fun tasks.

Practice by giving simple instructions that your child is likely to follow. This gives you the opportunity to provide praise, attention and possibly other forms of reinforcement after they have successfully followed through on your directions.

9. Balance demands with other interactions.

Be aware of the number of demands you give your child over the course of the day and how you word them. If you find that you must repeat instructions or prompt your child to complete each step in a routine, consider using a visual support.

10. Use clear and simple instructions.

Avoid asking your child whether they **want** to complete a task, unless it really is an option not to do it. Instead, give simple and clear instructions at a level of language that your child can understand.



Positive Reinforcement

Reinforcement needs to be given **immediately** after the child completes the task and must be appropriate in size and magnitude.



Maximize/Minimize

If your child engages in a problematic behaviour during a routine, try to minimize the attention you give to the behaviour to the extent possible. Sometimes it won't be possible to ignore the behaviour if, for instance, if the behaviour could result in injury. Your child may also intensify their behaviour to get the usual reaction from you. Again, if the behaviour doesn't pose a risk, avoid giving it your attention. Giving better quality attention for the behaviour you want to see tips the scale in favour of your child engaging in that behaviour, giving it more power than inappropriate behaviour.

Getting Started

- **Set simple and realistic goals.**
Choose one strategy to try at a time, and only implement a second strategy when you are comfortable with the first and it's happening consistently without problem behaviour.
- **Build on the strengths you already have.**
Ask yourself which tasks or routines are already going well at home or at school and why you think your child is successful at completing them, then try to find ways to use that information to support and promote better routines in other areas.
- **Choose a strategy that suits your needs.**
The strategy you choose needs to be the right fit for your situation in terms of time and resources.
- **Work as a team!**
Make sure everyone is on board with the strategy so that implementation is consistent from one adult to the next. Make any changes to the strategy as a team.