

Morning Routines

Getting ready and out of the house in the morning can be very stressful for families of children with an ASD. Often the number of changes can be very difficult for a child with ASD, and parents rushing to ensure that the family are washed, dressed, fed and on time for school or work can cause more anxiety for everyone.

Children with an ASD cope better with increased structure and regular routines. By planning ahead and implementing some behavioural approaches, the child (and consequently you as a parent) will have less stressful mornings.

Things that might help include:

- Prepare all you can the night before. Lay out the morning planners, prepare packed lunches, pack school bags and get uniform ready.
- Make a list of morning jobs and put them into an ordered plan. Complete them in the same order and tick them off as you have completed them.
- Wake your child 10 mins earlier than usual and allow them time to wake up fully before giving requests.
- Use a calm voice, shouting or heightened tone of voice can cause anxiety for a child with ASD, this can lead to challenging behaviours such as refusal or tantrums.
- Use a picture planner for your child, to help them to complete the morning routine.
- Give countdowns, prepare the child for an activity such as brushing teeth by giving 5, 3 and 1 minute warnings.
- Don't engage in arguments, state your expectation and do not respond to 'why?' 'can I have 5 more minutes?' etc.
- Be clear and concise, say what you mean. Children with ASD struggle with figurative language and non verbal communication, make sure you are not using these to issue instructions to your child.
- Break 'grouped activities' into smaller ones if needed. Many children will struggle to work out or order the sub tasks involved in 'get dressed' or 'tidy your room', so breakdown into smaller tasks using picture cards or lists.
- Look for the positives and reward them.
- Use a reward chart to encourage more appropriate behaviours.
- Don't nag, don't rant, don't lose your temper – take a deep breath and focus on the positives.
- Finally, don't pass responsibility on to others. Don't use threats such as, 'I'll phone your teacher', 'Santa won't come because you are not behaving', they will not help with the behaviour and can be very confusing for a child with ASD.