

Working with Children
and Adolescents who
have a learning
disability

Introducing Routines For Young People with a Learning Disability

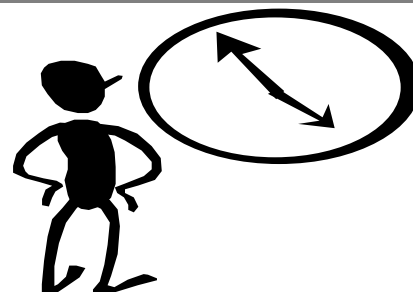


NHS
Chesterfield Royal Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

LD-CAMHS NORTH DERBYSHIRE

Information for Parents and Professionals

Children and young people with learning disabilities and/or autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) need clear routines. Because of their diagnosis, they may find it difficult to understand situations or to structure their time. They may also struggle with sequencing actions that they need to complete.



If a young person does not know what will be happening, either immediately or in the future, this can lead to uncertainty and make them feel extremely anxious. An effective way of supporting young person is to structure the environment around them with clear routines

When asked to do something children and young people can react by challenging their caregivers. This could be because they are unsure of what is happening, do not understand what is being asked of them or because they dislike the task they are being asked to complete.

Why are routines helpful?

A routine is a sequence of actions or activities that regularly take place in the same order. Most of us like life to be predictable as it helps us feel more secure. This is even more important for people with learning disabilities/ASD.

Routines can help young people to understand what is expected of them in specific environments and situations. Well established routines can help to reduce a young person's anxiety as they can be confident in knowing what will happen next, how people around them will behave and what they will need to do.

Examples of Routines

Different young people will be able to cope with a different amount of information in a routine. Some young people may be able to cope with information about the whole week ahead whereas other young people may only be able to cope with information about the current day or even the next activity.

Some examples of possible routines are shown below:

Daily Routines

Breakfast - wash - dress - school - swimming - dinner - TV - bed

Weekly Routines

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Sports day	School	School	School	Zoo	Grandma's house	Home

Activity Routine (e.g. Night-Time)

Bath - Brush teeth - Books - Relaxation - Bed

Implementing routines

Once a routine has been decided it is important that it is followed through in the same way each time. Some children may only need to complete a routine a couple of times to be confident about it, for other children it may take many repetitions of the routine.

Lots of changes will make routines unpredictable and will not give the stability the young person requires. This could result in a young person becoming confused and anxious. If there is going to be a change to a routine or plan, clearly communicate this to the young person before it happens, using simple language that is supported with pictures/symbols if possible. Pictures and symbols remind the young person and make it more real.

Ensure there is enough time for the young person to complete tasks without feeling rushed. If needed, allow for and build into the routine time to relax. This will further reduce any anxiety that the young person may have.

When a new routine is first introduced a young person may increase their challenging behaviour until the routine feels familiar and safe to them.

The increase in challenging behaviour may be a result of the young person being unsure of what is happening. Therefore it is important that this is communicated in a clear and simple way.

Challenging behaviour may also occur as a way of challenging the new boundaries of the routine. With perseverance of using the structured routine this should reduce with time as the child learns to accept the new boundaries and feels safe in the routine.

Practical Ways of Introducing Routines

- **Visual timetables**

A visual timetable showing each stage of the routine in picture form in the correct sequence can be useful for showing young people what will happen. Timetables can show a small part of the sequence at a time or can demonstrate the whole routine.



- **Using objects as a visual prompt to start a routine**

Some children may find it helpful to have a clear prompt that they are about to start a familiar routine. An object that the child closely associates with the routine could be shown/given to them before starting the routine.

For example, a sponge for a bath time routine, a specific cup for a mealtime routine.

- **Reward systems for completing routines**

Providing a reward for completing a routine can help to make it a positive experience and it can serve as positive reinforcement for understanding the routine. The reward can be anything that the child enjoys. Examples include: praise (e.g. “well done”); interaction; tangible rewards (e.g. magazine); time doing a favourite activity (e.g. watching a film); and attention (e.g. smiles and hugs).

When to Consider Asking for more Specialist Help

- If you have followed the advice on this information leaflet and difficulties persist that have a negative impact.
- Please talk to your Paediatrician, Social Worker, or School for further information and support. These professionals may talk to you about a referral to the LD-CAMHS team.