

Maintain and Build New Routines



Maintain Routines

As you are providing instruction in the home, it is highly recommended to establish and maintain routines. Important routines to maintain include:

- **Sleep/wake routines:** Maintaining physical health is key for all family members and ensuring proper sleep is an important contributor.
- **School work routines:** Identify blocks of time dedicated to each subject area on consistent basis.
- **Household chores/daily living skills:** Participating in the structured house chores and routines is a recommended strategy for everyone in the household.
- **Visual Schedule:** Expanding the use of a visual schedule throughout the day may help participation in activities at home and reduce anxiety. You may already be using elements of a visual schedule such as a calendar on the refrigerator. These should and can be extended for use across the entire day. The format and length of the schedule may vary based on the activity and your child's needs.
- **Task Analysis:** Some students may need the additional support of a task analysis which is a strategy of breaking down tasks/activities into smaller steps. Some tips for creating a task analysis include:
 1. Choose a task with definitive start and end (example: making a snack, get dressed).
 2. Write down the steps as you do the task or as you watch another adult do the task.
 3. Give the steps to someone else to try to follow and make sure they are clear.
 4. Write the final steps on a piece of paper to guide instruction for teaching the task.
 5. If needed, draw, or take picture cues for each step to post as a visual schedule for your child to reference.
 6. Task Analysis example for making a snack:
 1. Go to kitchen
 2. Get a plate from cupboard
 3. Place plate on counter
 4. Take banana from basket
 5. Place banana on plate
 6. Get cracker box from cupboard
 7. Open box
 8. Place crackers onto plate
 9. Close Box
 10. Put box back in cupboard
 11. Get a cup
 12. Fill cup with water
 13. Take water cup to table
 14. Get napkin
 15. Take napkin and plate to table
 16. Sit down and eat





Build New Routines

It may also be necessary to create new routines during this time, as there are many new demands of caregivers—possibly homeschooling for the first time, continuing to work in/out of the home, and/or caring for multiple children or other family members. Several new routines that may be helpful are described here:

- **Transitioning off screens:** Transitioning away from a device, especially after a period of extended use, may be difficult for your child. Establishing a clear, consistent, and concrete routine for this transition can better prepare the individual for the coming transition and offer support throughout.
 - **Use a visual timer:** It may be helpful for your child to “see” how much time remains of screen time before they will be expected to transition to off the device.
 - **Visual countdown system:** Like the visual timer, a visual countdown allows an individual to “see” how much time is remaining in an activity. The countdown differs, however, because there is no specific time increment used. This tool is beneficial if the timing of the transition needs to be flexible (example: parent would like the child to stay engaged on the device during a work call but doesn’t know when it will end). A countdown system can be made with numbered or colored squares or sticky notes, or any shape or style that is meaningful to the child. As the transition nears, you can pull off or cross off the top item (example: the number 5) so your child is able to see that only 4 items remain. You can then decide how quickly or slowly to remove the remaining items depending on when the transition will occur.
- **Offer choices:** Creating regular opportunities across the day where family members have a voice about what happens and when it happens can serve as an effective anxiety reducing strategy and a communication tool. These choices might include the route for the nightly walk, meal options, order of activities for the day, and/or preferences for activities.
- **Creating a workspace in the home:** Establish a designated workspace to help clarify expectations and reduce distractions. This may be a spot at the dining room table designated by a colored placemat and facing away from the television or window. If multiple children are working in one space, consider adding a small visual divider (example: an open folder) between them.

Source: Hume, K., Waters, V., Sam, A., Steinbrenner, J., Perkins, Y., Dees, B., Tomaszewski, B., Rentschler, L., Szendrey, S., McIntyre, N., White, M., Nowell, S., & Odom, S. (2020). *Supporting individuals with autism through uncertain times*. Chapel Hill, NC: School of Education and Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Retrieved from: <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/supporting-individuals-autism-through-uncertain-times>

