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## **How can I help Ease My Child Back into the School Routine from Home?**

We all struggle getting back into our regular routine after holidays and for autistic children, who we know often experience difficulty in understanding even the slightest change to their routine, this can be especially difficult. Whether your child is starting school for the first time, or moving to a new stream, the most important advice is not to take for granted that your child will automatically adapt to a new routine and environment.

We know that we need to communicate changes in routine directly and *very* clearly to children. How we communicate these changes to ensure the child understands is critical.

### **Visual Communication**

It is always useful to remember Temple Grandin's advice, that pictures were her first language and that words were her second language. Temple Grandin, an autistic woman has written about her experience from the perspective of growing up as an autistic person. This is especially useful to read. It provides a window into the how an autistic individual experiences the world, while also remembering that each child is an individual and interacts with the world differently.

### **Planning Ahead**

It is important to signal the change in routine ahead of time. While your child, may understand without the need for visual supports, such as photographs or drawings, it doesn't do any harm to use photographs or drawings to explain the change in routine. For example, you can have photographs of the school bus; the school, the classroom; the teacher and or books from the school, which you can share with your child as you are discussing this change in routine.

Social stories are another good way of explaining to your child about a change in routine.

### **Visual Timetables**

Another useful way of easing your child back into their regular routine is to use visual timetables. These build on your child's visual learning strengths, promote independence and confidence and can reduce children's anxiety as they can clearly see what their day looks like. You can use real-life objects, photographs, drawings or symbols when making the timetable and use velcro to attach these to a board.

Symbols Inclusion Project offers software to create timetables.

However you can easily make your own timetables at very little cost and personalise them for your child. You can place the timetable in a prominent place in the home, such as on the fridge. Making the timetable portable ensures that it can be taken as your child move around the house and also as they go to school, it can be placed in your child's school bag.

Adapted from: <https://asiam.ie/how-can-i-help-ease-my-child-back-into-the-school-routine-from-home/>

It is a good idea also to chat with your child's teacher about the use of visual timetables in school for your child. At this early stage, there is no need to use print on the timetable, photographs or symbols will suffice.

Dr Emer Ring is the Head of the Department of Reflective Pedacology and Early Childhood Studies at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. As part of our *#BackToRoutine* series for beginning the new school term, she's answered a number of commonly asked questions and concerns families have when starting school.