

# A resource pack to help tackle anxiety in autistic children: Outlining the role of routine in reducing anxiety

T-Res Project



# Contents

About T-Res	1
This Resource Pack	1
The relationship between anxiety and routine	2
Why schedules are important	2
What is a visual schedule?	3
Aim of a visual schedule	3
How to make a visual schedule	4
Putting it in to practice	4
Our resources	5





## About T-Res

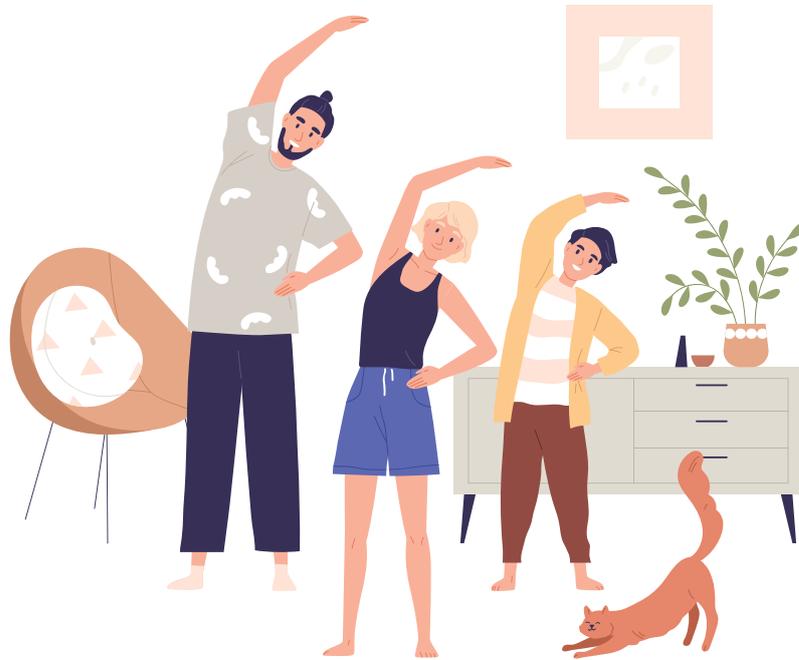
The T-Res Project is funded by the Health Research Board (HRB) under the COVID-19 Rapid Response fund. It is led by Dr Sinéad Smyth for the Dublin City University School of Psychology.

## This Resource Pack

The following resource pack can be used as a tool to help children to develop / redevelop a routine and manage anxiety levels which has changed due to COVID-19. It will help you to:

- i) plan and prepare
- i) communicate
- ii) support your child as they take the necessary steps.

The resources included are designed to support children of different ages, aptitudes and abilities both at home, in school and in the community.



## The relationship between routine and anxiety

Parents and young people with autism have reported that there are higher levels of anxiety and greater difficulty managing big emotions since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding anxiety, where it stems from, how to avoid and manage it are all important issues.

Change to routine and unexpected change are one issue that can cause anxiety. Indeed, a lot of the time when things change we can feel a loss of control over our environment or self and that can be associated with feelings of anxiety.

## Why schedules are important

One good way to deal with this anxiety is to first set in place and maintain routine. When things are predictable, we feel more in control and less anxious. Schedules are one way to build a routine. Naturally things can change and so we may also need to build in flexibility or tolerance for change.

It makes sense to develop a basic schedule that can be implemented at any level of COVID-19 restrictions (so it doesn't rely on certain places that may be closed or activities that cannot be completed at higher levels of restrictions particularly during winter months).

It is very important to clearly communicate the schedule and any changes that may be coming up. This will help people to prepare for change and reduce anxiety.

## What is a visual schedule?

People use different kinds of schedules to remind them where, when and what they need to do. Examples include: calendars, school timetables, diaries. Students and young people (and their grown ups!) can benefit from visual schedules anytime in any setting.

## Aim of visual Schedules

The aim of a visual schedule is to provide a visual representation of routine whether that is a whole day, the school day or even one event or task in the day. When we say something out loud, like our plan for the day, those words are gone once they are uttered. With a visual schedule, we have a visual reminder, which is often portable, to remind us of what is happening.

### Aim of visual scheduled



**I know...**

- ...what's happening
- ...where should it be
- ...when should I be there



**So...**

- ...events are predictable



**and I feel...**

- ...prepared
- ...independent
- ...less anxious

## How to make a visual schedule

Visual schedules should be individualised to the person, event and context. For that reason, you should tailor these for your child or student. Before you prepare your schedule, think about 1) what you are scheduling (a whole day, part of a day, one activity or event) 2) what it should help your child or student to achieve 3) what will your child or student respond to best?

Some tips for creating effective visual schedules.

- Make it as easy to understand as possible
- Use an object related to or representing the activity, a photo, symbol or words
- Put activities in order of which will be done first, second and so on (top to bottom or left to right)
- If you can make the schedule changeable by using Velcro and interchangeable activities, that can be a helpful way to build flexibility into the routine.

## Putting it in to practice

- Frequently pair the object (e.g. picture) and the activity so that your child or student will learn what the object stands for.
- Introduce the schedule and use it consistently
- Let the child know that an event or change of activity is approaching by using the telling them and using an object to signal.
- Tick off when completed or put object in finish box.



## Our resources

We have created some sample schedules as part of this resource pack. These can differ depending on the age and support needs of your child or students.

1. Example 1 is of a schedule like a diary or timetable which might work well for an older or more verbal child.
2. Example 2 is a pictorial visual schedule which would work well for a child with less verbal skills.
3. Example 3 is a first then schedule. This can be helpful to plan a transition between two activities or an action that must be completed before something else can be done.

<b>MY SCHEDULE</b>	TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
	MY NAME IS					
	<input type="text"/>					
	DATE					
	<input type="text"/>					
	<b>NOTES</b>					

## Visual Schedule



Get dressed



Breakfast



Brush teeth

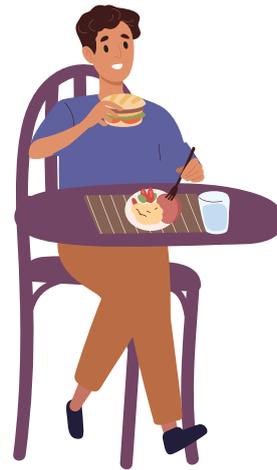


School work

## First-Then



First sit down



Then snack

