

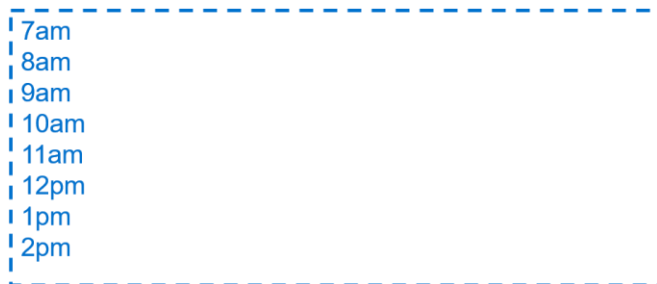
# Building family routines when your child has additional needs: information for families

Everyone likes a bit of routine in their day to day life – it helps us know what to expect, what to wear and where we need to be at what time. While a bit of ‘off the cuff’ or unplanned activity is fine, having some sort of daily routine is helpful. This is even more important if your child has additional needs. Some types of additional need – especially autism spectrum disorders and/or learning disability – can make it hard for someone to cope with change and unfamiliarity, so it’s helpful to develop a family routine to help them cope. This also helps brothers and sisters too if they have scheduled time each day with their parents alone to stop them feeling left out of things. This information sheet from Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) explains how you can develop a family routine and then make sure your child understands it. It also describes the importance of sharing details of this routine with other people just in case.

A routine is simply a schedule of what happens when and in what order. They can be very specific or broader covering what happens in a day or week – every routine is different and varies according to a child’s individual needs.

## Making a start

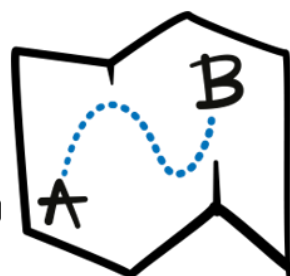
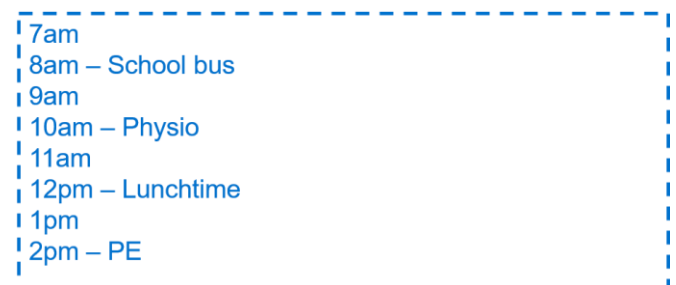
Using a big bit of paper, either write times or days down one side (depending on whether it’s a daily or weekly routine).



Add activities or things that have to be done at a certain time each day or week.



*For example, if the school bus picks up your child at 8am every day – add this to the paper.*

Add others things that happen at the same time each day to fill in a few more blanks.



You could add a section to the bottom of the paper so you can list if your child needs to take anything specific with them on that day.

Things I need to take with me:

- PE kit 
- A snack for break time 

## Working backwards

Once you've added the things that can't be moved, you can work backwards to fill in other gaps before and after.




*For example, if the school bus picks up your child at 8am every day but you know it takes them 30 minutes to have breakfast, then the latest time they can have it is at 7.30am.*

7.30am – Breakfast  
 8am – School bus  
 9am  
 10am – Physio  
 11am  
 12pm – Lunchtime  
 1pm  
 2pm – PE

Carry on doing this until all of your child's daily activities are noted.

## Making it visual


Once you have the basic information on your daily routine, you can think about jazzing it up a bit! Some families find colour coding works but a 'visual timetable' with symbols or pictures work for others.


7.30am	Breakfast	
8am	School bus	
9am		
10am	Physio	
11am		
12pm	Lunch time	


At GOSH, we use a symbol system called Widgit™ but you can use whatever system your child uses at school.


## Breaking down tasks


Some children find they need to break parts of the routine into separate steps – this means they can do everything in order and are less likely to forget something.

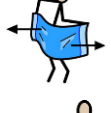
Wake up 


Get out of bed 

Have a wee 

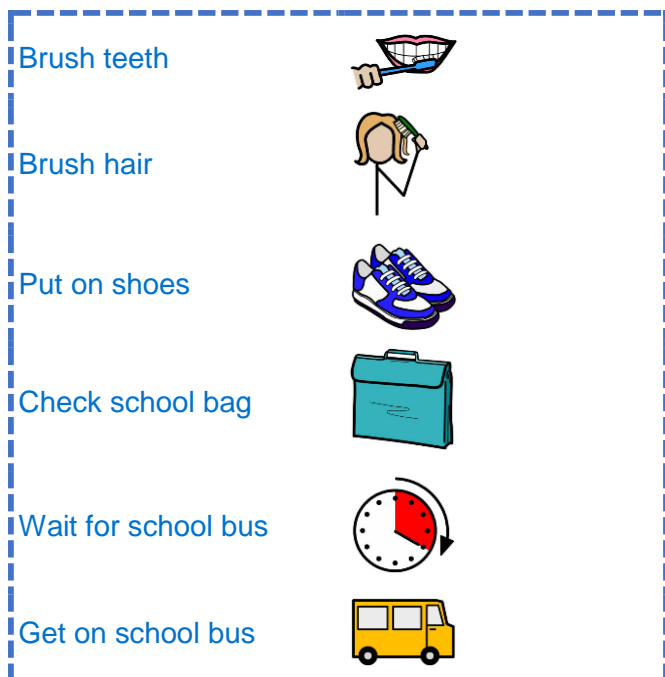
Eat breakfast 

Have a shower 

Dry off using towel 

Get dressed 





## Test it out

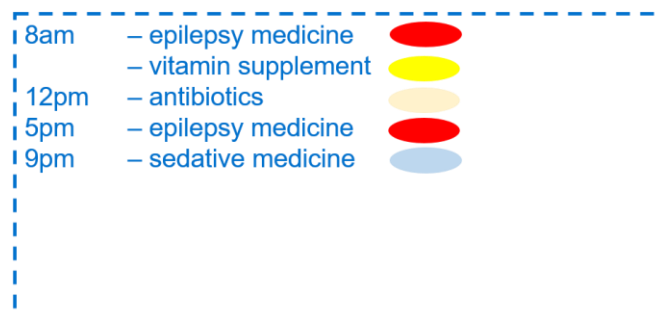
It's unlikely that you'll get your routine (and any posters displaying it) right first time, so it's worth trying it out for a few days to see if it works or needs a bit of tweaking.

It might be a good idea to use school holidays to test routines – this way there will be less pressure on you if things get a bit behind. Even during the holidays it's better to keep to some sort of routine, particularly around bed times and getting up times.

## Think about other things that need doing

When you have a routine, if it works well you could extend it to other things, such as medicines, particularly if your child takes different sorts at different times of day.

As well as the type of medicine your child has to take, you can add the brand name, the dosage and colour of the medicine as well – anything that makes it easier to see which medicine is needed at what time.



## Building in rewards for following the routine

It can help some children and young people to get 'stars' that count towards a reward or present if they complete a task or do things on time for a few days.

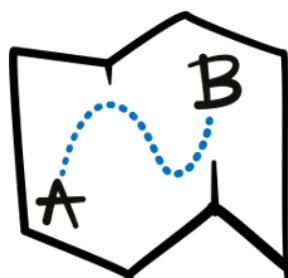
This doesn't have to be a big or expensive reward – just something that you know your child will enjoy. It doesn't even have to be an object – you could build up stars until there's enough for an outing to the city farm for instance.

Remember the key to reward charts is to reinforce good behaviour rather than punish bad behaviour. Always add a star if your child follows the routine but never take one away if they don't.

## Things can change

There will always be circumstances where it's not possible to follow the routine – when your child is unwell or has to go to a clinic appointment, for instance. It's important to build in a bit of flexibility for when your everyday routine can't happen.

Perhaps you could develop something similar for these times – for example, the steps your child needs to take to get to a clinic appointment. If you laminate this (cover it in plastic), you can write on the actual times you need to do things when you know the time of the appointment.



8am	Wake up
8.15am	Get out of bed
8.30am	Have a shower
9am	Get dressed
9.30am	Have breakfast
10am	Travel to GOSH
12pm	Go to clinic

can be helpful for other family members to understand what needs doing and when.

This can be as simple as keeping your daily routine on display somewhere in the house plus a folder of 'out of the ordinary' routines with instructions for when to use them.

You could also include them in your child's hospital passport or similar document – have a look at the Easy Health website [www.easyhealth.org.uk](http://www.easyhealth.org.uk) for examples you can use.

Remember to keep the routines up to date – for instance, if your child moves to another school or takes another type of medicine – an out of date routine could be more of a problem than having no routine at all.

## Share information about your routines

Once you have your routines sorted and they are working well, it can be important to share this information.

*For instance, if you are your child's primary caregiver and you have to suddenly leave home for a day or two, it*

## Further information and support

The Learning Disabilities team at GOSH can help you develop a routine when your child has additional needs. Call 020 7813 8465 or email [learning.disability@gosh.nhs.uk](mailto:learning.disability@gosh.nhs.uk). Other people such as the Occupational Therapy and Play teams may also be able to help too.

The following organisations outside of GOSH may be able to advise and support you about daily routines:

- Mencap – call their helpline on 0808 808 1111 from Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm or visit their website at [www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)
- The National Autistic Society – call their helpline on 0808 800 4104 from Monday to Friday from 10am to 3pm or visit their website at [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)
- Scope – call their helpline on 0808 800 3333 or visit their website at [www.scope.org.uk](http://www.scope.org.uk)

