

# Back-to-School Checklist for Families of Students with ASD

*(Elementary School, K–8)*

## ☐ Establish a morning/evening routine 1–2 weeks before school

- **Why:** Predictability reduces anxiety and helps with smoother transitions.
- **Examples:**
  - Set a consistent bedtime/wake-up time.
  - Practice the sequence: wake up → brush teeth → eat breakfast → get dressed → pack backpack.
  - Use timers or music cues (“When the timer rings, it’s time for shoes”).

## ☐ Use a visual schedule for wake-up, school prep, and after-school activities

- **Why:** Many children with ASD thrive on visual supports. It decreases verbal prompting and fosters independence.
- **Examples:**
  - Picture cards showing: toothbrush, clothes, cereal bowl, backpack, school bus.
  - Use apps like *Choiceworks* or simple printed charts with Velcro/laminated icons.
  - Cross off tasks as they’re completed for a sense of accomplishment.

## ☐ Prepare a social story about classroom routines, teacher, and peers

- **Why:** Social stories help children rehearse expectations and reduce uncertainty.
- **Examples:**
  - A story with simple text and pictures: “When I go to school, I will see my teacher, Mrs. Lee. I will sit on the carpet for circle time. If I feel nervous, I can take deep breaths.”
  - Include photos of the actual school/teacher if available.

**☐ Tour the school/classroom if possible before the first day**

- **Why:** Familiarity with the environment decreases sensory overwhelm.
- **Examples:**
  - Walk through hallways, bathrooms, cafeteria, playground.
  - Practice the route from drop-off point to classroom.
  - Take pictures to review at home.

**☐ Pack a comfort item or fidget tool for transitions**

- **Why:** Sensory regulation helps children cope with stress or waiting times.
- **Examples:**
  - Small squishy ball, chewable necklace, soft fabric swatch.
  - Noise-cancelling headphones for assemblies or fire drills.
  - A family photo tucked in their backpack.

**☐ Share an “About Me” one-page profile with teacher**

- **Why:** Teachers gain quick insight into your child’s strengths and needs.
- **Examples (sections to include):**
  - *Strengths:* “Loves puzzles and drawing.”
  - *Challenges:* “Loud noises and unexpected changes.”
  - *Calming Strategies:* “Deep breaths, squeezing stress ball, quiet corner.”
  - *Parent Note:* “Please let us know about any changes in routine.”

**☐ Practice independence skills (packing lunch, toileting, dressing)**

- **Why:** Independence fosters confidence and reduces teacher/peer reliance.
- **Examples:**
  - Practice opening lunch containers, zippers, Velcro shoes.
  - Rehearse bathroom sequence: “Flush → wash hands → dry.”
  - Lay out clothes the night before to avoid morning stress.

## **☐ Build in quiet downtime after school to help with decompression**

- **Why:** School days are socially and sensory demanding. Children often need recovery time.
- **Examples:**
  - 20–30 minutes in a quiet room with dim lighting.
  - Listening to calming music, drawing, or using a weighted blanket.
  - Avoid diving straight into homework or extra activities.

## **☐ Celebrate small successes with praise or simple rewards**

- **Why:** Positive reinforcement builds confidence and motivation.
- **Examples:**
  - Verbal praise: “I noticed how you put your shoes on all by yourself—great job!”
  - Sticker chart for smooth mornings.
  - Small privileges: choosing the bedtime story, extra playtime with a favorite toy.

**Tip for Parents:** Start with **1–2 new strategies at a time**—don’t feel pressured to implement the whole checklist at once. Consistency matters more than perfection.