



PLAYTIME

Reintegreat School Toolkit

Section: Creating Routines

Why Routines Matter

Children thrive on **predictability and structure**. Consistent routines:

- Provide a sense of **safety and security**.
- Reduce conflict and anxiety.
- Help children build **self-regulation** and emotional resilience.
- Promote independence by supporting them to anticipate what comes next.

When routines are clear, children know what to expect and can focus on learning rather than uncertainty.

Core Benefits of Routines

- **Confidence and security** – Predictable transitions reassure children that positive experiences (play, learning, rest) will return.
- **Emotional regulation** – Predictability supports children in handling frustration or disappointment.
- **Conflict prevention** – Reduces disputes by offering clear expectations.
- **Skill development** – Helps children practise problem-solving, empathy, and responsibility.

Key Strategies

1. Use Visual Timetables

- Display a **whole-class visual timetable** that is updated daily.
- For pupils with additional needs (e.g., Autism, ADHD), provide **personalised timetables**.
- Use images and symbols to represent activities for younger children or those with limited literacy.

2. Establish Consistent Daily Routines

- Start each day with a predictable **welcome/check-in activity**.
- Signal transitions with a **consistent sound, music, or visual cue**.
- Build routines for:

- Lining up
- Circle time
- Moving between tasks
- Break/lunch times
- Home time

 **Tip:** Remember the attention span guideline – roughly **one minute per year of age** – to plan transitions effectively.

3. Teach a Simple Problem-Solving Process

Conflicts will arise. Use a consistent framework:

1. **Stop** – Ensure children are calm and safe.
2. **Label feelings** – Use emotion words (“I can see you’re angry”).
3. **Ask what happened** – Use *what* questions instead of *why* (less abstract).
4. **Involve children in solutions** – Encourage them to generate ideas.
5. **Agree and move on** – Reinforce when they’ve resolved the issue positively.

4. Build Emotional Vocabulary

- Model feeling words daily (angry, disappointed, excited, proud).
- Use storybooks and role play to explore emotions.
- Display an **emotions chart** in the classroom for children to use.
- Encourage the use of “**I statements**” (e.g., “I feel upset when...”).

5. Don’t Force Apologies

- Focus on **teaching empathy and alternatives** to hurtful behaviour.
- Guide children to express feelings and choose an appropriate way to make amends.
- Reinforce **authentic apologies** when children are ready.

Supporting Playtimes & Unstructured Periods

Challenges for Children with Autism or SEND:

- **Unstructured time** may feel overwhelming.
- **Sensory overload** from sights, sounds, weather, and crowds.
- **Changing rules** in games can cause stress.
- **Social demands** can feel confusing and exhausting.

Practical Solutions:

- **Add structure:** Breaktime game bags, 5-minute structured activities, or set play

zones.

- **Safe spaces:** Allow children to take quiet time indoors or in a calm area if needed.
- **Buddy groups:** Train peers to include children sensitively in play.
- **Breaktime clubs:** Offer alternative clubs that align with children's interests.
- **Teach social skills:** Use role play, social stories, and small group work to build peer understanding and empathy.
- **Sensory activities:** Provide circuits, movement breaks, or calming tools for sensory regulation.

Classroom Implementation Checklist

- Whole-class and personalised timetables in place
- Predictable daily transitions and routines
- Emotion vocabulary displayed and modelled
- Calm conflict-resolution process consistently applied
- Structured and supported playtime strategies
- Opportunities for independence and ownership (jobs, responsibilities)

Key Takeaway

Children flourish in safe, structured, and predictable environments.

By embedding consistent routines, supporting problem-solving, and being mindful of sensory and social challenges (especially at playtimes), we equip pupils with the resilience, independence, and emotional intelligence needed to thrive both in school and beyond.

