



# PLAYTIME

## Reintegrated 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.

