



AUTISM CLASSROOM RESOURCES PODCAST

EPISODE 81: 5 Key Characteristics of a Strong Classroom Schedule

URL: <http://autismclassroomresources.com/episode81>


Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host, Dr. Christine Reeve for more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education, but my real love is helping special educators. Like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research-based practices in a practical way in your classroom to make your job easier and more effective.

Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I'm Chris Reeve and I'm your host and I'm so glad you joined us today. For our series on systems for classroom design. We are focusing on setting up the classroom to implement the IEP. And today I'm going to focus on how to set up the classroom schedule. I've talked about these tons on the blog, and I reviewed the general process in episode 43 on the podcast. And I actually linked there to a number of posts with different examples of schedules. And you can listen to that at [autismclassroomresources.com/Episode 43](http://autismclassroomresources.com/Episode43) and you'll grab those links there as well.

To me, the schedule is the most important and pivotal element of classroom design. It drives the other pieces of the classroom. It tells me what the physical space will look like. And it's based on the results of the teaching implementation plan that I talked about in episode 80 last week. Once the TIP is completed, it becomes easier to see what activities are going into the schedule. And once the schedule is complete, the other pieces start to fall into place.

And today, I want to talk about what makes a strong schedule. So, what are the characteristics that we want to make sure a schedule has? In episode 43, you'll read about the process of putting a schedule together. And I've got tools and guidelines on the blog that can help you with that. And today, I'm going to talk about as we go through that process, what do we want our schedule to look like? So, I'm going to put tons of links in the blog post for this episode and I've got a free download for you there as well. You'll find lots of examples in previous posts as well as that download at [autismclassroomresources.com/episode 81](http://autismclassroomresources.com/episode81). And today, you will learn a lot about what your schedule needs to look like in the things we want to think about as we start thinking about our schedules for the new year. So, let's get started.

One of the most significant characteristics that we look for in creating our schedule is to create a schedule that has high levels of engagement with instruction and interaction. And that is actually a Highly Leveraged Practice from the Centers




for Exceptional Children. CEC has identified that as an element that is critical for effective learning in special education which is kind of a no-brainer for those of us who have worked in this field for a long time. That has been a characteristic that we have looked at for a long time. It's certainly part of our core model that we talked about in episode 80. The schedule is a big part of what drives that engagement. If the schedule moves too slowly or has too much downtime or gaps that students aren't engaged in. Then that's going to lead to ineffective instruction. And it's also going to lead to a lot of challenging behavior for many of our students.

Now let's face it and many of you may have heard me say this before if you've ever been to any of my training or you've ever heard, I probably set it on the podcast before downtime is not your friend. Keeping your students engaged is probably one of the best strategies that you have for preventing challenging behavior. But it's also incredibly critical for instruction for our students because let's face it if your students are in any kind of special education, they have no time to waste. They are already trying to play catch-up to some degree. They have a lot of skills to learn. And in reality, every part of their day is a learning opportunity. So, we need to take advantage of that with our schedule, and we need to make sure that our schedules are tight, that our schedules have high levels of engagement and limited downtime. We want to make sure that we are building schedules that have that type of characteristic.

Now, that does not mean that instruction has to be all direct instruction or even explicit instruction by the teacher. So, when I say high engagement and instruction that does not mean that they're going to be with the teacher all day long. I'm not talking about a one-to-one classroom, that is not most of your classrooms nor is that necessarily what's necessarily good for all of our students. It could be practicing skills that they've worked on with a paraprofessional. It can and it should be group instruction with targeted goals for group learning because our students should be learning that. It can be independent work time where they're learning to work on their own because they should be learning that. But the key is that you want to have the students engaged in activities throughout the day not waiting for something to happen. The more they're engaged productively, the less time there is for problems and that's really part of the key.

Number 2, each activity on the schedule should be tied to specific goals and objectives for each student. And this is where I told you with the teaching implementation plan was going to make your life easier in episode 80. On the schedule, it should be easy to see from the TIP what activities are tied to which goals and objectives for each student. Our students don't have time to waste and for most of them, every time, every part of the day is a teaching opportunity. And in fact, on their IEP, I'm willing to bet that their special Ed minutes are counted for all the time

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that they are in school including lunch and recess. So, think about what the goals are and the objectives are for each activity on the schedule for each student because that's going to be critical.

Number 3, the pace of the day should move quickly. I know that I have created a good schedule and it is a give and take. It is a problem-solving process. When I look up at the clock and I think, wow, how did it get to be lunchtime? I have a problem schedule. When I am thinking, oh my gosh, is this ever going to end? People learn best when instruction is moving at a brisk pace. Now, obviously, we tailor that to the learning speed of the students that we have. And some who have processing delays we're going to slow it down a little bit. But you want the pace of the day, in general, to move quickly. So, again, you've got limited downtime and little delay for distraction because you want to keep them focused on what you're doing.

Number 4, your students are engaged for the length of time that the activities last. But remember that every student does not have to stay in each activity for the same amount of time, I'm going to say that louder for those in the back, not every student has to stay in the activity for the same amount of time. But you do have to plan for it. Some students might stay in the group activity for the whole twenty minutes and some might stay for 5. And then a pair of might go with them to do an independent work system, or did you direct instruction? The key is to plan for it. Now, this happens primarily when you have a group of students where maybe a big group of them can handle a longer time together, then maybe one or two students. Just make sure that you've got a planned activity for the students that are going to be coming to the larger group for a shorter period of time. It's not a time for them just to wander around with nothing to do because that's asking for trouble. It's not a quiet break with no activity. It's a scheduled learning activity that they transition to its planful.

You might decide that it makes sense for them to come to the beginning of the morning meeting. For instance, five minutes to check-in and greet their peers and then go to independent work or you may decide that it works better for them to do some direct instruction with a para for fifteen minutes and then come join the group in morning meeting for the last activity. And then transition to the next activity with the rest of the class. And again, the key is to plan it out ahead of time and adjust when you try it based on how it goes. But don't try to hold the student, who isn't ready for a longer group in that activity by forcing him to stay there when he isn't able to learn in that environment. The same is true when we take kids into inclusion in general ed. Don't try to make it a one size fits all model. We have to build their ability to stay in those activities and don't say that we have to stick with that 5 minutes the whole year either. we're going to build their ability to stay there, but we have to start where they're at.




Number five, every student's goals and objectives and your curriculum are integrated into the schedule. With the TIP, you'll go back and forth while creating your schedule and make changes. You'll find that you can't put all the students' goals and morning meeting for instance, because there isn't enough time and staff to fit them and the data collection all in that time. So, some will need to move to other times a day. So, there will be some flexibility in what you're doing. Now, obviously, the schedule will not be perfect on the first day, or maybe, probably even the first week. We all would love to be able to say, Alexa, redo my schedule and have that happen. But unfortunately, I have not figured out how to make that work on Alexa, Google, or Siri.

But as I said in last week's episode "best begun is half done." And I still have a very bad British accent! So says Mary Poppins. And having a schedule that you thought through at the beginning of the year, before the students walk in the door means that you can troubleshoot what you have rather than trying to create it on the fly. And that saves you a lot of exhaustion at a time that is exhausting enough. As the year gets started, you'll see what works and what doesn't and make adjustments. Keep in mind that when you're running the schedule at any time of year the times are flexible. You'll see how it's going with your students in your team. And you might want to start an activity a little bit earlier or later depending on how it's going. Classroom schedules aren't train schedules. They don't always run perfectly on time. Just make sure that you have waiting activities to keep students engaged, to pull out if you need them. And I'll make sure to include a link in the post I have on table tasks I use for waiting times that can help with that because you can even schedule them into your day.

Those are some of the guidelines for what your schedule should look like to get you started. But there's nothing better than seeing actual schedules to give you ideas about the activities you might include for different ages and things like that. And I've got you covered. Hop over to [autismclassroomresources.com/Episode 80](http://autismclassroomresources.com/Episode80) and you can grab a set of five free schedule grid examples of all different ages and Special Ed types of classrooms. I'll also link to a post that has tons of examples of different classrooms so you can see those different schedules as well. And you'll find a link to my teaching plan and classroom schedule toolkit on Teachers Pay Teachers. It's got a walkthrough of classroom schedules for different ages, templates for the TIP, and schedule grids that I use with lots of different options, and videos to walk you through how to use them.

But if you'd like even more help, come over to the Special Educator Academy and join us in the on-demand course for setting up your classroom to maximize engagement study group. We'll be starting on June 11th for the courses available on-demand



anytime. We'll be meeting on Zoom weekly, starting on June 11th to go through different material and will have weekly challenges with prizes where you can get feedback and ideas from other special educators and from me. I'm creating a TIP, getting your schedule together, working on a zoning plan, and organizing your room. We're here to help you get started and have a successful year. So don't go it alone. Don't teach on an island. Come try us out with a free 7-Day trial at specialeducatoracademy.com.

Thanks so much for tuning in and spending this time with me. I'll be back next week to talk about the physical structure of the room. And until then, I'll be trying to figure out how to get Siri to set up a classroom schedule and I'll get back to you if I figure that out. Thanks.