

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development.

**Christine Reeve:** 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 Christine Reeve, and I'm your host. I'm glad that you're joining us as we move through our series on designing, organizing, and choreographing your classroom. We are taking the CORE model that I talked about in Episode 80 and working through the fundamental structure of the classroom that supports the instructional components. We started with the IEP, then we talked about the CORE model, which is the Classroom Organization Results in Effectiveness model. If you've listened to Episodes 80 through 83, then you've organized your information about the students on the TIP, you've developed your schedule, you've designed your classroom space, and you've even choreographed your staff with your staff zoning plan. If it was only that easy. For those of you tuned in to those episodes, no, I still haven't figured out how to get Alexa to fix your classroom schedule but I am still working on it.

In our last episode, I talked about what visuals you need to really get the year started. I put them in order so that you can determine how to spend your time getting ready. That brings me to where we are now. In today's episode, I want to talk about organizing and routines to help you carry on the day-to-day routines of the classroom. I've got some strategies that will help keep the structure of the classroom going and make things run more automagically throughout the year. The key is to establish them and keep them going.

Now, let me tell you that if you are someone who feels like you have to do everything yourself, this episode is for you because trust me, I have been there, done that, bought the crazy honor badge that I thought I needed. I'm here to tell you that you can not do this alone. You just can't. If you struggle with this and are trying to figure out how to make your classroom so it really runs itself without you having eight hands in it, then this episode is one that you do not want to miss. Plus I've got a free download for you today on the blog to help with that problem and to keep those routines running. As always, if you are looking for more ideas and ways to make your classroom run more efficiently, and effectively, we have a whole course and tons of short tips at the Special Educator Academy that can help with just that problem. Come try us out with a seven-day free trial at [specialeducatoracademy.com](http://specialeducatoracademy.com). Now, let's get started.

Once you have the structure of the classroom so that the staff knows what each student needs, the schedule is clear and the areas of the room are established, your physical structure at the center of the CORE is there. Your staff knows what they need to do, when, and with whom, then your staff structure of the CORE is there and you're ready to start looking at how to automate other kinds of tasks. The more that you put systems in place for organization of time, space, and materials, the less you have to think about them. The more that you can delegate, the less stress and decision fatigue that you personally, and the rest of your staff, will have. Decision

fatigue is real. It's not some new-age term that just emerged. I'll put a link to a blog post that I wrote about it because it will get you if you aren't careful.

The whole point of the CORE model is that the classroom runs without you. I know that sounds counterintuitive, but our goal is for it to run without you having to run it so that you can actually teach rather than manage. We don't want your job to be a manager. We want your job to be a teacher because that is what you went to school to be, if I remember correctly.

Let's look at the routines that you should be thinking about getting set up in your classroom. The good news is you already have some of these established. Your schedule becomes your routine. Your zoning plan, once you get it both set up—and it does take a few weeks—should also become a routine over time. Your lesson plans should also become a routine. Getting your lesson plans set up to be written on specific days should also become a routine. Setting aside an afternoon that you're going to write them should also be a routine. Your lesson plans are an important part of your communication with your staff. They let the staff know what needs to be done in addition to just the mechanics. I'm going to talk about this actually in our next episode, but establishing a routine lets your staff know when the lesson plans will be available for them to look at and it sets up a routine for you to get them done regularly so that you're not banging your head over trying to do a bunch of them.

Another set of routines to set up are data routines where the data sheets go when they're completed, when and how the data gets analyzed. I'm going to talk about those in a lot of detail in a couple of future episodes as well. Another set of routines are the classroom routines who are responsible for resetting things. That's going to go into our zoning plan. I think I talked a little bit about that in that episode; who resets an activity so it's ready to go when the next group gets there, who resets the snack area so that it's ready for art activities when the students arrive, who resets morning meetings so it's ready for afternoon meetings when we get there.

It's also important that when we're thinking about these routines, we're not just thinking about staff but you can also include your students with responsibilities for these. Don't just think that we're talking about staff having these responsibilities, we can assign students to them too. It can be routines like how attendance is getting to the office because we have to put that in my zoning plan because I never remember to do that. If I'm running the classroom, if I'm ever doing a demo class in your class, make sure I remember that.

Tasks might also include things like who resets the schedules, who cleans up different areas so that you don't have four people doing it, who makes sure that materials are ready for the next day, who makes sure that the tasks are out for the first activities of the day? Because we always want to make sure that the materials are ready so that as soon as the students walk in the door, they sit down and their hands are on what they need to do because most of us are working with students that aren't really great at waiting for the stuff they need to do.

You might be asking, "This is all well and good, Chris, but how do I make sure that these routines get done? You don't know my staff and I like things done a certain way. How do I know that everything's going to get done right?" No worries, I've got you covered. The answer is checklists. If you are like me—and I've met enough of you to know that many of you

are—delegating is hard because things don't get done the way that you would do them. I have started referring to myself as a recovering perfectionist and a developing good enough-er. I saw that on social media somewhere and it really struck me because that is so me.

It's really funny because I'm perfectionist about things that I probably shouldn't be and probably not perfectionist about things I probably should be, but I'm really working on the idea that done is better than perfect and sometimes, good enough is good enough. If you are like me, then delegating is hard because it seems easier to do it yourself than to give feedback to somebody else on doing it when they don't do it the way that you want it. Sometimes, you know that maybe the way you want it isn't the way it has to be but you really want it that way and you feel bad giving feedback.

It's hard to give people feedback, especially when you're trapped in a room with people all day. But in the end, what I have learned—and it's taken me a while to learn this, so let me share it with you—if you never delegate, you will always have to do that task for yourself forever. You will never be able to move that task off your plate and your life will never get easier. In fact, it's going to get harder because you as the teacher will always get more tasks to do. If you never move anything off of your plate, your plate is just going to get fuller, and fuller, and fuller until you can't handle it anymore because tasks will keep coming. If you don't delegate, you're going to be completely overwhelmed.

One way to make delegation easier, more successful, and make you feel more comfortable with it is to use checklists. When I talked about zoning plans, I talked about the fact that it's so much easier sometimes when it's in writing, so everybody's on the same page while checklists are one way to do that too. Checklists are setting up the steps of how to do a task the way you want it done. They make it more likely that it will be done the same way each time, that all the steps will be done and that the tasks will be done the way you want them. Checklists might include running and resetting independent work. In fact, I've got a free checklist in the Free Resource Library for you on that. It is how you set up the independent work system and how you get it set up correctly. That makes it easier. Resetting visual schedules: one thing you might want to do too is take a picture of them to match each day of the week so they can make them match. Cleaning up the toy area: use pictures of where they go, then enlist the students to help with that task. Setting up the classroom for the next day: resetting specific activities like setting up morning meetings. I put everything in order on board. Show them the order of the boards and put that on your checklist. It could be completing tasks, like organizing the data collection sheets or filing away permanent products into student folders.

The secondary advantage of checklists for all the staff in addition to getting things done the way you want them is that they reduce the need to think. I like to think of myself as a pretty intellectual person but apparently, I really try to avoid thinking a lot when I'm in the classroom so that I can focus on the student that I'm working with and not have to think about other stuff. I don't want to think about things like resetting the visual schedule. The more that we can do those things on an automatic checklist, the less stressful it is and the less decisions we have to think about as we go.

Make sure that you hop over to the blog post at [autismclassroomresources.com/episode85](http://autismclassroomresources.com/episode85) and grab the free Independent Work Setup Checklist to get you started with classroom routines. It comes from a set of checklists that were developed for the members of the Special Educator Academy. If you want to give us a try with a seven-day free trial, check us out at the [specialeducatoracademy.com](http://specialeducatoracademy.com). Thank you so much for tuning in. I hope you'll come back next week when I'll be sharing about lesson plans and setting up routines for those, including why you want to use them. Until then, I'll just be over here working on my good enough-er skills.