

# ACR 163 FINAL

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## SPEAKERS

Chris

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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 your host, Chris Reeve. And I want to thank you for tuning in and sharing a very precious time here and I hope that today you will get some ideas about how to make it to the end of the school year.

When I'm recording this, we're coming very close to the end of the school year for some of you. Some of you, it's a little farther off, or you might be one of those valliant people that's teaching ESY for which Thank you. Because you know that students need ESY teachers.

But all of that means that we're coming to a time of year where the students get a little squirrely because they're ready to be out of school. Sometimes the staff gets a little squirrely because we're all really exhausted. And it's just kind of a squirrely little time where things become a little bit less organized, a little bit more chaotic, and a little bit tougher with behavior and disruptions and things like that.

So all of that means that we need to figure out ways of helping our students to stay on track, trying to keep our classroom as organized and structured as we can, and getting what needs to be done, done in order to finish out the school year, you are almost done. So it's worth persevering even though I know it's been a very difficult year in a lot of different ways. And it just feels like it's time to throw in the towel.

But in today's episode, I'm going to talk about some strategies that can actually help you ride out the end of the school year, and hopefully come out with your sanity intact. Today's episode is all about strategies that you can use to help reduce the chaos in your class, keep your students' behaviors more under control, and keep your students from developing bad habits that will carry over into next year. And they'll help the whole of the classroom staff and students completely included when you have fewer problem behaviors and fewer disruptions. So let's get started.

Number one is one that will not surprise anyone who's been listening to the podcast for a while and that is we need to add in more visuals. Remember that your students are going to need more visual support at times like the end of the year when the schedule doesn't go as planned and unexpected things keep cropping up.

I know that for many of them, they may have needed a lot more visual structure at the beginning of the year, you may have weaned them off of some of that. There is nothing wrong with going back to a strategy that worked for them in the past. It'll fade out again when they don't need it. We all rely on extra structural support when things get chaotic or confusing. I write down more notes when I know that there's a lot of stuff going on, because I know that my brain will not remember them. But at other times my brain does remember them so I don't write them down.

So this is exactly like that. And it's okay to step back and help a student be successful, with more support, than unsuccessful with support we didn't think he needed, and probably he does. So one way to do that is to always, we're going to want to pull out our visual schedules. So many of us use visuals scheduled for each activity of the day. And there's a few things that we can do to kind of boost that up.

If your students have gotten away from using a visual schedule, then it might be useful to bring it back for some of our students when this schedule is no longer routine, when Field Day intercedes and things keep popping up, and we don't always know what's going to happen next.

Another is to make sure that we create a visual for a special activity. So if you have my classroom visual bundle, it comes all the different sets come with a special activity that's just a star with confetti around it and it just says special activity, because you can always predict what the special activity is going to be. You don't always have the chorus recital practice, school play practice, graduation practice, whatever it is, you don't always know and anticipate what those things are. And sometimes you find out about five minutes, hopefully at least five minutes before you actually have to take the student to this activity.

That's a grand time to pull off your special activity visual, and put it on his schedule in place of what is usually happening at that time of day. That makes it easier just to know something is different today, you don't have to have the perfect visual for everything. Things that only happen once a year, special activity will probably take care of that for most of our students.

Another is that you can break your schedule down into smaller steps. So for instance, you may find you need to back up and you used to have a step by step of the arrival routine come into the classroom, but their backpack away, put their coat away, maybe take off their snow boots, whatever the steps are, you know, put the home note notebook in the bin, whatever those steps are, you may have started out with a mini schedule for those steps, which was just a schedule that basically broke those tinier steps down than just full activities.

It might be time to go back to some of those that the students haven't used in a while, because maybe they just need a reminder about what needs to get done. And the mini schedule is a way to do it without constantly standing over them reminding them of the steps. Better that they're independent with the visuals than us having to be right there to walk them through it.

The other thing you might want to do is have mini schedules for activities that might, it might include a combination of things, there are special activities that you're doing in school. So for instance, in my mini schedule bundle, we have field day with community based instruction. So we have going to a restaurant, going to a movie theater, going to a concert, and they're all broken down into the steps. So you might have a step that set or a mini schedule, maybe you put it on a painter stick or a piece of cardboard to take with you when you go when you leave the classroom of the school. And it might say I have to wait for the van, we're going to go to the restaurant, stand in line, place the order, then we're going to eat then we're going to clean up, then we're going to go to field day.

You know for field day, you might choose from some of your PE activities that you know we're going to play tag, then play with a friend, then we're going to have horseback riding, then it'll be time to play kickball. So whatever you think the the Field Day activities might be, you might want to have a schedule broken down for something like that. And they don't always have to be special visuals, they can often be found in a schedule set that you have.

Another thing that you can do is to use contingency maps. And contingency maps are simply a way of diagramming out how a student's behavior will lead to specific outcomes. So if I do A, I'll be successful, and I'll get what I want. If I do B, I won't get what I want. So it's something that's very structured and visual. And so we have free visual contingency maps that you can actually make your own. We've got the graphic templates in our free resource library. So [autismclassroomresources.com/free](http://autismclassroomresources.com/free). And I will make sure that all of these visuals plus the contingency maps are included in the show notes.

You also want to make sure that your visual supports go everywhere with you. Remember that your students need them more outside your class than in your class. And don't be concerned again, if you have a student that you feel is going backwards to using more visuals. Using more visuals is preferable to developing a problem behavior because they don't know what to expect.

The next thing is that we want to redirect with more words. Now we can use visuals as a way to do that. So visuals are a really good way to give a student direction without getting into a power struggle of telling him what to do and having him say no. Some of the kids will talk to the visuals but visuals don't talk back. So it's very easy then to kind of circumvent a power struggle in that way.

So one thing you might have is you might have a set of visuals that also were in my scheduled in bundles that are on your lanyard. And so you might just go up and tell a student who's overwhelmed. Take a deep breath, you might give one direction with a visual or you might just point to it, it depends on your student. So you figure out what works for you, what visuals you need. And that way everybody has them with them when you need them.

We have a tendency to talk and use words to our students about their behavior about what they should be doing what they shouldn't be doing. When probably if we responded with just a visual or visual paired with a statement, they will do what we want them to do instead of what they shouldn't do. When we call attention to not doing something that we're just probably just going to get more of that.

It also might be a really good time to pull out our first-then visuals. And you know again, if you haven't needed them, it's okay. And we have a free first then that basically says do this then you get to do what you want to do. And that can be really helpful for a student that's struggling say with field day or sitting in concert for a long period of time longer than he's ever sat in class.

So maybe you're taking frequent breaks, and you're putting a timer on the first and it says, you know, two minutes. And when that goes off, oh, now we're gonna go take a walk. And then we'll come back and do it again. And we'll come back and do it again. And again, there is a free one of these in the free resource library. And you can download it in multiple forms at [autismclassroomresources.com/break](http://autismclassroomresources.com/break).

The third thing is something that I call turning on your high octane mix. So in our instruction and our day, we strike a balance of the amount of reinforcement that we provide to the difficulty or the amount of work that we expect. And over time, chances are good that we've had to provide less reinforcement to get more work from our students. That they are able, you know, for fading our reinforcement effectively, that's what should be happening.

But now is the time that you may need to again take a step back very briefly, and switch on the high octane mix. Think of this as a balance, kind of like a seesaw, where reinforcement is on one end, and task difficulty is on the other. And so when one goes up, the other goes down. So in order to keep it balanced, if we are doing things that are hard or just seem hard, at the end of the year, maybe they're harder than they used to be, we need to up our reinforcement so that our seesaw stays balanced.

So at the end of the school year, I want you to imagine that you have an elephant sitting on the task difficulty side of the seesaw. That means that to balance it out, you're going to have to pull out more effective and probably more frequent reinforcement for appropriate behavior than we've used before. But doing that proactively can prevent meltdowns that we might have.

Now, if it's not really possible to balance that out, then you probably want, if it's not possible to boost your reinforcement, you may need to find a way to reduce the size of the elephant, to reduce the size of the demands. Maybe reduce it by how much work he gives you or the difficulty or how long he stays in the concert or how long he stays at Field Day or things like that.

So we want to make sure that we're keeping our seesaw balanced, and not bounce you or the elephant off like we did when we were on the playground with your kids. But it's really important. I call it the high octane mix, because it's kind of like taking fuel. And I need to add more of something to my fuel. And it's high octane meaning high engagement, high excitement, high levels of reinforcement, so I can get the students to stay engaged. And I talked about the magic of engagement in a previous episode that I'll link to in the show notes.

Really quick, as I talk about all of these things, if you are interested in learning more how to about how to work effectively, with students who struggle with escape related behavior, and they're struggling with basic skills in communication, we have a ton of resources resources for you in the special educator academy that can help. Grab everything, all different kinds of things from a five minute video of what to do when you can't remove a student from a situation, which might be helpful right about this time of year, or a one hour workshop on how to actually teach him a better communication strategy to replace that challenging behavior, or a whole course on behavioral problem solving. And maybe you want to tackle it over the summer. And that can help you figure out why the behaviors happening and how to put together a successful behavior support plan. So we have lots of other areas available in the academy as well. But those are some of the behavioral things that I think can be helpful. And you can get a free seven day trial at [specialeducatoracademy.com](https://specialeducatoracademy.com). And I'll make sure that that's in the show notes as well.

Number four, try to keep to the consistent schedule. I know this isn't always easy, because people tend to throw the schedule out the window at this time of year, and they don't necessarily tell you what they're doing. But you know how important consistency and routine are for our students, for our staff, and for ourselves. I talked about the CORE framework a lot in the last year. And episode 146 talks a lot about that. You want to make sure that you're trying to keep as consistent a routine for everybody. As you can essentially I know that you're trying to balance multiple hands of spinning plates. And you've been doing it very successfully until someone came along and knocked one of the pillars out from under the plates and now you're trying to get them all back in the air again. So this is a way to try to get through it without quite so many spinning plates.

And number five is we can create social stories for new activities. Social stories can be a great way to introduce information about changes. None of our students, whether they're in special ed or not do well with chaos. Let's face it, the more that we can help them to understand and expect the changes

and expectations of new situations, like sitting in a concert, going to graduation, the better they're going to be able to manage them.

You may even want to back up to some basic expectations about common routines. Remember, I told you, you may need a mini schedule for more common routines that the student hadn't needed them for? Maybe they need to go back and review some of the stories like I can't always be first in line, lining up in class. How do we do that? How do we walk quietly in the hallway? Raising my hand to talk in class. Those basic common routines and at that social stories, I'll link in the show notes that can help you with that as well.

So I hope that those give you five things that you can try to keep your classroom on track this year, for the end of the year. You are almost at the end, you're almost at the finish line. Just keep plugging until you get there.

Thank you so much for joining me for today's podcast. I hope that these ideas will help you maintain until the end of the year. I would love to hear how you cope with the end of the year. So come into our Facebook group and share with the picture of this podcast. We would love to talk more about it. In the meantime, hang in there, keep calm and manage the chaos as best you can. I'll see you next week.

Thanks so much for listening to today's episode of the Autism Classroom Resources podcast. For even more support, you can access free materials, webinars and Video Tips inside my free resource library. Sign up at [autismclassroomresources.com/free](https://autismclassroomresources.com/free). That's F-R-E-E or click the link in the show notes to join the free library today. I'll catch you again next week.