



Sabrina Gennari (picture) 2017

## Autism: How To Respond to Rituals

If you are a parent, brother, sister, teacher of a child with autism, you may be very well acquainted with the need for rituals or repetitive behaviour in kids on the spectrum! This article attempts to shed a little light on why they might happen. Possibly. Remember autism is a complex thing and there are no simple solutions!

The future is uncertain. That's for sure! However if you are a kid with autism that's especially true. Most folk have a kind of inbuilt guidance system that helps us deal with the big "what happens next?" question with a deal of confidence. We can't exactly see into the future but certain brain functions make us feel like we can.

In kids with ASC this guidance system is less effective. Hence the future question, i.e. (what the future might look like and how it will affect me) goes unanswered. And all human beings have a problem with unanswered questions.

We just can't have that. The human response to this 'not knowing' goes in several, interchangeable directions. We have options:-

Freak out! We've all done this when we are sent into a tailspin by not knowing what the heck is going on.

Get real curious about it. Ask questions. Investigate. Test things out e.g. If I do this lets just see if that will turn out the way I think it will...

Distract ourselves. Find something that we recognise and bury our head in it!

You'll be familiar with all of these in yourself but especially in your young person/s on the spectrum.

So where do the 'rituals' fit in with all this? What sense can we make of them? Well if the future is unknown territory to you (because of the difficulty as a kid with autism you have with imagining things) then you could build a bridge to that future made out of stuff that you know and trust. These would be like stepping stones made out of past events and actions. Trouble is each time you get to the future you realise you are still staring at a void you can't handle. So you lay another stepping stone of familiarity and take your next step... And these stones are often what neurotypical folk refer to in people with autism as rituals.

Lots more articles at  
[positiveaboutautism.co.uk/articles](https://positiveaboutautism.co.uk/articles)

The answer? Well, I'd say they are best left alone. Work around them. Make the future less unknown by making it more see-able and concrete. Don't just tell - show. Work on skills. 'Staying calm' skills.

'Finding out not freaking out' skills. 'Asking for assistance' skills. All these will make the need for rituals a bit smaller.

Of course, human beings are never simple and 'rituals' will have many underlying causes. So play detective and try things. But take it one step at a time.

*Chris Barson, Director, Positive About Autism™*

Lots more articles at  
[positiveaboutautism.co.uk/articles](https://positiveaboutautism.co.uk/articles)