



AuSM's highly trained, certified therapists have committed their careers to helping individuals with autism understand their diagnosis and address both the challenges and gifts that it can bring. The AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services team sends out a monthly e-mail to answer questions submitted by the autism community. This is one of the past issues of the column. Visit [www.ausm.org](http://www.ausm.org) to sign up to receive the e-mails.

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## Dear Therapist

Our young adult son, who used to have no problem getting himself ready for school in the morning, has developed a new "routine" that just isn't working. A van picks him up each weekday, consistently on time. When we found out the scheduled pick-up time, our son made plans to be ready 5 minutes ahead of time, and that first morning did an amazing job of getting ready. Now when his alarm goes off, he is awake, but stays in bed. When he does get up, he sits and does nothing until the last possible moment (which is becoming later and later). Gentle reminders (and not so gentle, I'm afraid, as my frustration increases) to "get moving" or "move on to your next step" don't work. With his agreement, we tried using timers to prompt him, but they only worked the first time and then he ignored them. We've tried picking out his clothes the night before to make getting dressed easier, but he still sits on his bed instead of getting dressed. When he finally decides it's time to get going, it becomes a mad scramble, with only a few minutes to eat breakfast and brush his teeth. The van must wait a minute or two for him to get out the door. I want to understand why he might need to do things this way, but we've also talked about the importance of being on time, especially when other people (or a job) are involved. Unfortunately, this current "routine" is leaving us both stressed and frazzled!

– Routine Run Amok

## Dear Routine Reviser:

In situations like this, it can be helpful to do some behavioral detective work and to examine what are the young person's motivations. Whatever you want him to do, he's got to have at least a certain amount of his own motivation to do it, not just doing it because parents say so or because "it's scheduled."



Behavior-detective work to consider:

- Is he groggy due to a physical issue such as staying up too late, frequent night waking, poor sleep, or related to medication, caffeine addiction or something physiological like this?
- Is staying in bed slightly more desirable, pushing it just a little higher than going wherever he's going which might not necessarily be awful, but could be "meh"?
- Is his destination in the van a place that causes distress, or is at least less motivating than staying in bed?
- Does he not want to leave home because he doesn't want to leave the person he's leaving at home?

How do we tip the scales to make sure it's motivating to get good and plenty of sleep, to make the program he's going to more positive? A beneficial support is to build in something awesome at the beginning of the day for when he first gets to his destination.

A young adult probably won't say much if we ask "are you depressed?" so we need to ask about how is school or whatever they're doing during the day is going – and don't only ask him, also ask the people at the place where he's going. It's also beneficial to look at sleep and family dynamics to see if they're involved.

We hope these suggestions will help your family. This question was discussed by multiple AuSM Therapists and answered collectively.

If you would like to submit a question for the AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services team, please e-mail [autismcounseling@ausm.org](mailto:autismcounseling@ausm.org) or contact us at 651.647.1083.