

BEHAVIOR · ALL GRADES

First-Week Routines

What to teach, in what order

Why routines matter more than rules

Every behavior management book in the world will tell you: explicitly teach your routines in the first two weeks. Most teachers don't, because September is so busy that 'just getting on with it' feels more efficient. It isn't. The hours you spend now teaching routines explicitly save weeks of low-level disruption later. A class that knows how to enter the room, how to line up, how to transition between activities, how to ask for help, and how to pack up — that class can do anything. A class without those routines will spend the year fighting through them.

The 12 routines to teach (in order)

#	Routine	When to teach
1	Entering the classroom calmly	Day 1, morning
2	Putting things away (book bag, coat)	Day 1, morning
3	Where to sit and what to do first	Day 1, morning
4	Carpet/desk expectations	Day 1, morning
5	How to ask a question (signal vs voice)	Day 1, after first lesson
6	Going to the toilet	Day 1, after first lesson
7	Lining up at the door	Day 1, before break
8	Walking through the school	Day 1, before break
9	Coming back from break/lunch	Day 1, after break



#	Routine	When to teach
10	Transitions between activities	Day 2, throughout
11	When work is finished	Day 2, after first independent task
12	Packing up at end of day	Day 1, end of day

How to teach a routine (the script)

<p>1. Tell them why</p> <p>'When we line up calmly, we get more time outside. When we don't, we waste it.' Children follow rules better when they understand the purpose.</p>	<p>2. Show them how</p> <p>Demonstrate yourself. Walk through the steps. Say each step out loud as you do it. 'I'm pushing my chair in. I'm walking quietly. I'm joining the back of the line.'</p>
<p>3. Let them try</p> <p>Have a child or two model. Praise specifically what's right. Adjust what's not. Have the whole class try. Reset and try again if it isn't right.</p>	<p>4. Practise daily</p> <p>For two weeks, every time you do this thing, narrate the routine. 'Remember — chairs in, then walk to the line.' By week three, you can drop the narration.</p>

When to re-teach

Routines slip. Predictably:

- **AFTER A HOLIDAY.** Reset on day one. Don't assume they'll remember.
- **AFTER A WET LUNCH.** Energy is high. Re-teach the carpet routine after lunch.
- **AFTER A SPECIAL EVENT.** Christmas concert, school trip, swimming. The next day's routines wobble. Reset.
- **WHEN A NEW CHILD ARRIVES.** They haven't been taught your routines. Pair them with a buddy who shows them. Re-teaching isn't failure — it's the work.

What to do when routines break down mid-year

If your class's routines have collapsed by November, don't try to enforce harder. Re-teach.

1. Take 10 minutes. 'I've noticed our line-up has got messy. Let's reset.'
2. Don't blame. 'It happens. Habits drift. We're going to fix it.'
3. Walk through the routine again. Practise. Praise.
4. Hold the line for a week. Then it's back. This works at any point in the year. Routines respond to deliberate teaching, even months in.

