

When the Schedule Changes

A free printable social story for ages 4-10

Unexpected schedule changes, like a substitute teacher, an assembly, or indoor recess, can derail the whole day for children who rely on routine. This story builds flexibility skills and is a staple support in autism classrooms. Read it proactively during calm weeks, not only after a hard day.

Most days at school follow a schedule.

A schedule tells me what happens first, next, and last.

Sometimes the schedule changes.

Maybe there is an assembly, a substitute teacher, or indoor recess.

Changes can feel surprising. Some kids feel upset when plans change.

It is okay to feel that way.

When plans change, I can say to myself, "This is different, and I can handle it."

I can ask my teacher, "What will happen next?"

Knowing the new plan helps my body feel calmer.

The rest of the day usually goes on like normal.

Grown-ups at school keep me safe, even when plans change.

Being flexible is something I am learning, and I get better with practice.

Tips for Reading This Story Together

- Practice tiny, planned surprises at home (a different cup, a new route to the park) and narrate them with the story's mantra: this is different, and I can handle it.
- Ask the teacher to use a change card or symbol on the visual schedule so changes are shown, not just announced.
- Reread the story before predictable disruptions like field trips, picture day, or the week a substitute is expected.
- Celebrate flexibility out loud when it happens, naming exactly what your child did to cope.

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