The Relation Between Restrictive and Repetitive Behaviors and Family Routine Among Families of Children with ASD
Stephanie A. Fox, Celia Tam, Kristin V. Christodulu, Melissa L. Rinaldi & Allen C. Israel

Background
- Interventions aimed to benefit children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often emphasize the importance of implementing structure in the home environment (Wetherby & Woods, 2006).
- These interventions seek to increase predictability for children, thus reducing the potential for anxiety and ensuing challenging behaviors (Vismara & Rogers, 2010).
- While numerous studies have cited the benefits of routine implementation, little literature has examined the relation between specific characteristics of ASD and family routine (DeGrace, 2004; Schaal, 2011).
- Of specific interest is the presence of insistence on sameness and ritualistic behaviors, which are categories of behaviors within the broad core characteristic of restrictive interests and repetitive behaviors (RRBs).
- Individuals with ASD who exhibit ritualistic behaviors and insistence on sameness seek to maintain rigid and highly routinized environments; however, it remains unclear whether these behaviors are related to family structure and routine. The examination of this relation would help to shed light on when and for whom the implementation of family routine is likely to be most beneficial.
- The present study sought to examine the relation between restrictive and repetitive behaviors among children with ASD and the level of family routine implemented by their parents.

Method
Participants
- The sample consisted of 68 parents of children with ASD from throughout New York State.
- Participants were subscribed to a university autism center mailing list or accessed the current survey from the center’s website.

Survey Information and Measures
- The Repetitive Behavior Scale (RBS; Lam & Aman, 2007) was disseminated to assess insistence on sameness and ritualistic behaviors.
- The Stability of Activities in the Family Environment (SAFE; Israel & Roderick, 2001) was used to assess family routine. This measure specifically measures the regularity of family activities and routines that occur both in the home (e.g., family meals) as well as family supported activities that occur outside the home or without family members.
- A rating of the overall regularity of routines and activities in the family household was used to operationalize family routine for the purposes of the current study.

Data Analysis
- Descriptive statistics were calculated to assess the normality of the data as well as the demographic characteristics of the sample.
- A linear regression was run to evaluate the predictability of children’s restrictive and repetitive behaviors for family routine.

Results
- Multiple regression revealed that child insistence on sameness and ritualistic behaviors significantly predicted family routine, $F(1,66)=5.597, p=.021$.
- The two predictor model accounted for eight percent of the variance in parent report of overall family routine.

Discussion
- Results suggest that RRBs are significantly predictive of family routine.
- This finding may indicate that families adapt to their children’s rigidities and implement routines.
- Future longitudinal studies should be conducted to evaluate the directional nature of the relation, thus disentangling whether parental accommodation to child rigidity may reduce child flexibility over time.
- Should a directional relation be found, it may suggest that interventions for children with RRBs should include components that promote child flexibility.