

The Importance of Routines for Children



Mention the word 'routine' and it sounds dull, ordinary and boring, but there are also lots of positives to be said for having a structure to your day, especially where young children are concerned. Putting in place a daily routine can help all your family members to feel comfortable because they know what to expect and when.

BENEFITS

- Living in an organized and predictable environment can give children certainty and help them to feel safe and secure, which can reduce anxiety.
- Routines are useful for establishing boundaries for young children, which can help them to develop self-discipline.



- Transitions – such as being dropped off at nursery or going to bed – can be smoother because your child will come to know what to expect and when. This can reduce upset or tantrums.
- Having a daily routine can help set your child's body clock, enabling their body to know when it's time to relax and go to sleep or start to wake up. Better sleep patterns can support a child's ability to learn and their behaviour.
- Routines can be enjoyable – snuggling up to read a bedtime story together – and can strengthen attachments and sense of security.
- For parents, having a routine can help you feel more in control and organized, which can reduce stress and actually give you more 'me' time.
- Healthy habits – washing hands after using the toilet or cleaning teeth as part of morning or night routine – can be developed.
- Established routines can reduce upset and disputes because there are fewer surprises so, for example, tidying up toys before dinner becomes expected.

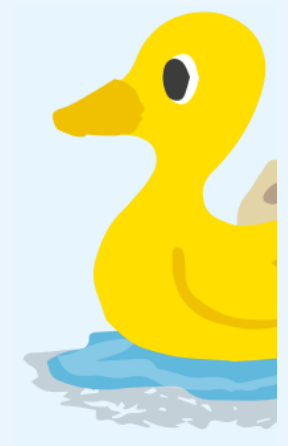
- Knowing what is due to happen can help your child develop empowering feelings of independence and self-discipline because they can start to take charge themselves, rather than only being told what to do.
- Being in a normal routine can actually make it easier for children to deal with out-of-the-ordinary events, such as the birth of a new sibling or moving house, because they have the foundation and familiarity of their daily structure to support and reassure them.



WHAT TO SCHEDULE

Every family has different working patterns and demands, so routines are very individual and must be based on your own needs. But for a routine to work it needs to be:

- Consistent
- Planned
- Predictable
- Regular.



Rather than becoming overwhelmed by the whole day, start by tackling the area of the day that you find most stressful or chaotic. Then think about what you could introduce to develop a routine that will make it simpler and less chaotic and then try to stick to it. For example:

Introduce a morning routine by thinking what times you need to be out of bed and out of the house on nursery days. Be prepared by getting your child's clothes, breakfast items and nappy bags ready the night before to reduce chaos and conflict. Then keep to an order – such as having cuddles, cleaning teeth, getting dressed and eating breakfast before putting shoes and coats on and leaving the house.



Decide on a suitable bedtime for your child and then plan a night-time routine that will help them to calm down and prepare for sleep – turning the TV or any other screen devices off before having a wash or bath, changing their nappy or going to the toilet and then sharing a book together before settling into bed with a favourite teddy.

For transitions such as leaving the childminder's house, you could prepare your child by asking the childminder to have tidy-up time or get their shoes and coat out in anticipation of your arrival.

GETTING ESTABLISHED

Having a routine may sound like an impossible task when you're juggling work and childcare, but in the long-run it should help you to calm the chaos. Be patient as it can take time for your child to get used to the regularity of a routine:

Remember to talk to your child and tell them what is going to happen so that they are reassured – 'We'll tidy up after lunch, read a book and then go to visit Nanny.'

Warn them of a shift in the day – 'The TV will be turned off when this programme has ended, and then it is bedtime.'

Consider using a visual timetable using photos or drawings to illustrate particular routines that your child is struggling with, or for them to look at to see if it's a nursery or home day.

While establishing a routine is important, don't be afraid to occasionally break from the norm and be spontaneous. Young children can be helped by routines that follow a recognizable pattern, but with some flexibility so that they don't become too rigid.



Hopefully, you'll find, with more routine, that there is also more time in your family's day for relaxation and fun.



Children fear the unknown.

Children's fear of the unknown includes everything from a strange new dish to the dark space under their bed. When children feel safe, they will be ready to take on new challenges. While this is reason enough to provide children with a routine, it also has another important developmental role. Structure and routines teach children how to discipline themselves.

What is your child afraid of?

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