Setting Routines

Having a routine allows children to predict and anticipate the events of their day. This helps them learn and feel secure. A daily routine also gives children a sense of stability in their lives and boosts their confidence as they take steps toward becoming independent. Regular routines may be particularly helpful for foster children who have lacked stability and security in their lives.

Routines have many other benefits. With a routine, day-to-day family life becomes a little more organized and predictable. When things run more smoothly, there is a good chance that the stress of running a household will be less. Routines at home help children adapt to routines in preschool, child care, and school. Allowing children to be part of the daily family routine — and setting a routine of their own — will improve their self-help skills. That, in turn, will make them more likely to want to take on more responsibility.

It is up to a parent or guardian to set a family routine and help children settle into routines of their own. These routines will vary, with morning routines being different than evening routines, and routines for very young children being different than those that suit older children.
**Tips for setting routines**

You will want to establish routines that work well for your child and for your family. Here is some advice that will help you to be successful.

**Infants and routines**

Infants can benefit from simple routines as well. Here are a few things to consider:

- Have an infant use the same furniture, the same kinds of bibs (buy several of the same kind), the same kind of bedding, crib bumpers, etc. As the infant gets older, add variety.
- Do not use eating, sleeping, bathing, furniture, clothes, etc. for any other purpose. For example, don’t allow bedtime to become playtime. The idea is to get an infant familiar and comfortable with one and only one activity. Bedtime is for sleeping, not playing and not for punishment.

**Repetition and consistency are important**

- It is important to do the same things in the same way every day until your child adapts well to the routine.
- While it is important to be consistent to promote stability, it is also important to be flexible enough to allow your child some freedom and give yourself some room to change the routine when necessary.
- Along with setting a routine, set aside some time for free play. During this time, let your child do almost anything that doesn’t violate rules for behavior or is dangerous.
- Pictures of daily activities displayed in order can help a child to learn routines.

**Morning routines**

Allowing children to make decisions and have some control encourages them to try to take on more responsibilities.

- Let your child choose his or her clothes for the day. If you feel your child is not able to choose the whole outfit, offer a few outfits to pick from. You also can do this the night before. You can teach dressing and undressing by allowing your child to do it at his or her own pace and by offering a little help when necessary.
- Let your child be a part of breakfast preparation. This might include providing a choice of breakfast foods. But don’t allow your child to change his or her mind once a choice is made. You also might let your child help set the table or get his or her own plate, bowl, cup, etc.
- Keep morning routines simple. You don’t want to overwhelm your child.
- Keep the routine going. You probably will have to remind your child from time to time to stay with the routine. You need to stay with the routine as well. Leading by example is very helpful.
**Afternoon and evening routines**

Children should be allowed to take part in planning their afternoons and the rest of their day. Even giving them a small amount of control will help them to feel important.

- At lunchtime, allow choices of what to eat. Offering choices of healthy foods is a good way to start a healthy diet. You also might allow your child to help you prepare lunch.
- Let your child help you get dinner ready. Even a job as simple as folding napkins or arranging silverware will help your child to feel important.
- Play time after dinner is an option—maybe a game involving the family. An after-dinner snack also might be part of the routine.
- **Bedtime routines are important. If a child gets used to a routine at bedtime, there is a good chance that bedtime will be less stressful for both of you.**
- Keep the bedtime routine simple at first. Change into pajamas and read a few stories, for example. As your child grows older, you can change the routine to better match new abilities, such as adding washing up and brushing teeth to the list of things to do.

**Chores**

Assigning children a few simple chores to be done daily or every week is a good way to help them become part of the family routine.

- Start with small jobs. Let your child help you do part of the job you are working on. For example, if you are doing laundry, have your child take the clothes out of the dryer. Then, when your child is ready, allow him or her to choose his or her own job, such as folding the clean laundry.
- Do this nearly every time, not just every once in a while.
- Even the smallest chores help to build children’s self-confidence and show them that they have responsibilities like everyone else.