

Routine: Things Your Child Can Count On

Routines are actions and events that are repeated at regular intervals. They are convenient ways to organize daily actions.

Typical daily family routines include wake up, bedtime, and dinner routines; common weekend routines might be a pancake breakfast, going to religious services, or watching a sporting event.

Routine has many benefits for you and your child.

- **Routine provides predictability.** In a world that sometimes seems chaotic and constantly shifting, your preschooler will find security and stability through routine.
- **Routine is comforting.** You never have to wonder what will happen next with a routine. Consistency is reassuring to both children and adults. We know what's expected of us and what to expect of others. We do routine things without thinking.
- **Routine helps with discipline.** Children argue less about a consistent set of actions; they take routine for granted.
- **Routine can be empowering.** Routine provides structure but with a chance for some limited negotiation. A child might decide: I want to hug grandma first, then mom. A child can choose a bedtime story or elect to sing a lullaby. Once the outline of the routine is formed, specifics can be varied.
- **Routine encourages cooperation.** When your preschooler knows what to expect, things are less unknown and less scary, meaning your preschooler feels more control over the situation which can result in greater cooperation.
- **Routine can help your child feel safe and secure.** Stress in a family is often first noticed by the disruption of family routines. It's an early

warning system suggesting that something is amiss. During times of stress (holidays, family crisis, divorce, etc.) pay close attention to routines. During turbulent times, routines are the path to stability.

- **Routine provides a supportive framework for the child to learn new skills.** While routines do not need to be rote or scheduled, they do need to be predictable enough to enhance your child's ability to anticipate opportunities to participate. Knowing that you are skating at the local rink every Sunday afternoon, lets your child decide what activities to join or tryout.

Bedtime is a common family struggle. Following are suggestions for implementing a bedtime routine.

1. An active child will rest better at night. Be sure to allow your child plenty of time outdoors to run and play.
2. Begin the calming down process at dinnertime. After dinner, do something relaxing such as going for a walk.
3. Allow your preschooler some quiet playtime. Offer blocks, books, puzzles or anything that will

be conducive to creative playtime. Quiet activity helps prepare your child for rest. Don't be upset if occasionally Dad wants to have a wrestle fest during this normally calm time. The child still has plenty of time to wind down before bed. If nothing else, it might tire him out even more.



4. Provide a healthy snack and drink. Food and drink in the tummy help alleviate the need for snacks after your child is tucked into bed.
5. Run a warm bath. Allow a minimum of fifteen minutes playtime in the tub, after the initial washing and shampooing. Buy a supply of creative bathtub toys only to be used in the tub.
6. After the bath, take care of all the "have to's". Get your child in a routine of getting dressed for bed, brushing his teeth, and toileting.
7. Put your child to bed with a few books for some relaxing reading time before sleep. Allow a ten to fifteen minute reading time but no longer than thirty minutes. Join in on this time if your child would like to hear you read or tell a story. Make sure your child understands that after the set time limit that it will be bedtime, no arguments.



8. After reading time is over, put the books away. Give your child a hug and kiss. Saying, "I love you," helps establish security in your child. Tuck your child lovingly into bed and say, "Goodnight."
9. If desired, turn on a tape or compact disc of classic or lullaby music. Playing the same music every night makes a soothing bedtime ritual.
10. Be firm to your established routine. The less you deviate from it the easier bedtime will be. Periodically, you may have to veer from your bedtime routine because of a special situation, but as long as the times are few and far between the routine will not be forgotten.

You will find that your child will want to continue the routine as much as you will.

To create a routine (wakeup, getting ready to leave in the morning, dinnertime, etc.) for your household, here are some guidelines:

- **Develop a list of absolutes** – things you expect from your child. By knowing these, you can be free to negotiate about things that are not absolutes and avoid frequent power struggles. There are times when you can be flexible in your approach to discipline, and times when an issue is non-negotiable. Example: During the work-day week, your child must be dressed and ready to go to child care by 7:30 a.m. On the weekends, you let your child get dressed later in the morning.
- **Use routines as a loose plan**, rather than a rigid guideline. Example: Your child usually goes down for a nap at 12:30 p.m., but today you stretched it until 1:15 p.m. because your child was having a wonderful time at the park.
- **Be consistent** with the routines you establish, while remaining flexible enough to respond to the individual circumstances of each situation. Example: You plan a play group visit in the morning so your child will be home for naptime.

Preschools and child care centers have long understood the importance and value of routines. They start and end the day with a series of familiar activities that form a comforting routine. At home familiar routines also mean the difference between a chaotic or calm house.

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