

What is a Routine?

Routines are how families organize themselves to get things done, spend time together and have fun. Every family has its own unique routines. Routines help family members know who should do what, when, in what order and how often.

Family life is often smoother with a few routines, but there's more to routines than this.

Routines also let your children know what's important to your family. For example, really special routines are sometimes called rituals. These can help strengthen your shared beliefs, values, and build a sense of belonging and togetherness in your family.

Maintaining normal daily routines can make it easier for children to deal with stressful events, like the birth of a new child, a divorce, the illness or death of a family member, a move, and starting school.

Why Routines are Good For Children

Some children like and need routine more than others. In general, though, routines have the following benefits for children:

Safety and belonging: An organized and predictable home environment helps children feel secure and looked after, particularly in stressful times or during difficult stages of development. Also, routines built around having fun or spending time together strengthen family relationships. For example, reading a story together before bed or going for a special snack after soccer practice can become a special time for you and your child to share.

Skills and responsibility: Having chores to do in family routines helps children develop a sense of responsibility and some basic skills like the ability to manage time. These are skills children can use for life.

And when children can do their parts of the routine with less help or supervision from you, it also helps them become more independent.

Healthy Habits: Routines can be a way of teaching younger children healthy habits, like brushing their teeth, taking medicine regularly, getting some exercise, or washing their hands after using the toilet.

This means that routines can be good for children's health. For example, children who wash their hands more regularly might be less likely to get colds and other common illnesses. Also, routines can reduce stress, and lower stress is good for children's immune systems.

Daily routines help set our body clocks too. For example, bedtime routines help children's bodies 'know' when it's time to sleep. This can be a big help when children reach adolescence and their body clocks start to change.

It can be easy to over-schedule family life. Routines have lots of benefits, but it's also good for children and parents to have free time to play, relax or be creative.

Routines are for Parents Too

Routines take some effort to create. But once you've set them up, they have lots of benefits:

- Routines help you get through your daily tasks and free up time for other things.
- Regular and consistent routines can help you feel like you're doing a good job as a parent.
- When life is busy, routines can help you feel more organized and in control, which lowers stress.
- Routines often free you from having to resolve disputes and make decisions. For example, if Sunday night is pizza night, no-one needs to argue what's for dinner.

Making a Daily Routine

There are no rules about how many or what kind of routines you should have. All families are different, and what works well for one family might not work for another.

Your routines need to be based on your individual family needs. But effective routines do share three key features:

- **Well planned:** In a good routine, everyone understands their roles, knows what they need to do and sees their roles as reasonable and fair. For example, your children know that they help set the table for dinner each night.
- **Regular:** Good routines become part of everyday family life. For example, you might look forward to Saturday hikes with grandparents.
- **Predictable:** In a good routine, things happen in the same order each time. For example, you always brush your teeth and read a story before bed.

Children with differing abilities find routines can be a big help. They can be even more important for children who find it hard to understand or cope with change.

Routine Examples

For toddlers and preschoolers, you could have routines for:

- Getting ready in the morning
- Getting together with other children to play, perhaps at playgroup
- Eating meals
- Spending time playing and talking together each day
- Reading books or telling stories
- Having quiet time and going to bed at night
- A bedtime routine for toddlers might be having a bath, brushing teeth and changing a diaper, having some quiet time while reading a book, then getting into bed for a special song and kiss good night.

Routines for School Age

For school-age children, you could have routines for:

- Getting ready in the morning and going to bed at night
- Tidying up toys
- Getting together with other children to play, perhaps after school once or twice a week
- Doing after-school activities like hobbies or sport
- Doing chores – for example, setting the dinner table, unpacking the dishwasher, helping with the laundry, or caring for pets

For school-age children, you might have a playdate routine. For example, on Mondays your school-age child is allowed to invite a friend over after school. When the friend goes home about 5pm, your child tidies up before setting the table for dinner.

Routines for the Whole Family

You could have family routines for:

- Preparing and eating meals together
- Spending family time, like regular walks after dinner or movie nights
- Having family meetings, or just taking turns talking about the day
- Spending special one-to-one time with parents
- Catching up with extended family and friends
- Taking part in special celebration days or community activities