

# Routines

**Imagine trying to get your family out of the house on time in the morning everyday.** No one has a plan and no one takes responsibility for themselves. Lots of reminding, nagging, mishaps, and lack of cooperation take place.

Establishing routines is key to making a chaotic home life turn into a smoother running household where all family members contribute. Routines are one of the most powerful forms of limit setting parents can use. Getting healthy routines established early on in children's lives set them up for a healthy adult lifestyle.

## ESTABLISHING ROUTINES

**Babies and Toddlers:** In the beginning, parents create the routine. Example of a morning routine: diaper change, nurse/ eat, get dressed, play time, diaper change, nurse/eat, naptime. Children this young relax into the rhythm parents establish and the pattern for routines begin to be set in their brains.

**Preschoolers and Young Elementary Years:** As children develop, they will push the limits of the routines. They develop-mentally need to take a role in establishing routines that will provide a sense of ownership over their lives. Where there is buy-in, there is often cooperation. To create buy-in, parents can establish what needs to be done and then let children take on the role of deciding the order of tasks within reason.

Create routine charts together to be posted in a visible place. On a poster board, write, decorate, take pictures of the child doing the tasks; be creative and most importantly, do it together, letting the child lead.

Use the chart to:

- Lead child to the next task. "What does the chart say to do next?"
- Let your child tell you what's next rather than you doing the telling over and over.
- Create a cooperative situation where the child is having some say over their lives.

**Tweens and Teens:** Direct teamwork between adult and child is called for in the older years. Adults begin discussions about routines with questions and reflections from observations. Adults **MUST** lead with an attitude of genuine curiosity to the teens' answers. Be willing to wait and listen; this creates an atmosphere of cooperation. For example:

- "I notice our mornings have been challenging. I need your ideas on how to make it smoother."
- "How is our routine for getting chores done working? Is there room for improvement?"
- "What's your idea about getting your homework done tonight?"



Adults are the bottom line, holding children to agreements. Plant yourself directly in front of your teen. Without lecturing or doing the task for them, try one of these strategies with a friendly yet firm tone:

- "I notice the table isn't set. Please do that now."
- "What was our agreement we established?"
- Simply smile and silently point to the clock to indicate, "It's time," or point to where they need to go. Don't move until they move.

### Good Routines Develop Long-Term Benefits:

- Security
- Trust
- Calmer atmosphere
- Time management skills
- Teamwork skills/sense of community
- Feeling capable and responsible
- Goal setting and managing a plan to achieve those goals

## Tips for Success with Routines

1. Routines require adults to take the leadership role by modeling them.
2. Routines require repetition.
3. Routines require pre-planning as a family.
4. Reflect together on how routines are working for everyone. Make changes as needed.
5. Be realistic and remember that routines may not work perfectly at first and may, at times, fall apart and need your guidance to re-establish them.
6. Remember, establishing something new takes time and follow-through on the adults' part. Humans resist change even if the change is a good thing.
7. Set routines but don't get rigidly stuck in them. On a few occasions, life circumstances require flexibility.
8. Expect resistance. Children can't see the value of clean toilets and early bedtimes and will want to challenge/barter to change the set plan. Stay calm. Don't negotiate, don't lecture or do it for them. If the moment gets heated, walk away, cool off, and revisit the process. Offer to have a future discussion about the routine but right now, expect them to follow-through.

## Examples of Routines

Here is a list of possible ideas. Know your family and together create what works for you and your children.

**Bedtime routine:** At a consistent time each night, clean up toys, move onto bath time, play a cooperative teeth brushing game (child brushes your teeth and you brush hers), let child pick one or two books depending on how much time is left before lights out, then share with each other something that made you both sad and happy that day, and end with a back rub.

**Dinner routine:** Rotate tasks weekly (assist with meal prep, set table, clear table, load dishwasher, etc.). At mealtime, make conversation a routine. Perhaps share something that went well that day, or a mistake made and a lesson learned.

**After school/homework routine:** Eat a healthy snack followed by physical activity (sports, park play time, bike home from school). Enjoy free choice time (socialize with friends, do favorite activity, alone time in room), start homework by agreed upon time, then break for dinner. Finish homework left undone.

**Household chore routine:** Pick a time to clean each week. Make a list of chores to be done and allow individuals to choose tasks from the list. Work together all at once to create a sense of team effort. Play upbeat music while you clean; rotate who picks the music.

## Going Deeper

It is important to resist the temptation to reward or punish children for following or not following routines. The goal with routines is for children to development into healthy adults with skills to create the life they desire. Children also need to have the experience of doing things simply because they need doing. Rewards and punishment do not get you to these goals; instead they teach to do things to gain a prize or avoid discomfort, shame and blame.

Trust your child's desire to develop into a cooperative family member. Use encouragement (not praise) and appreciations often; notice improvement, not perfection. This brings about the focus on the value of the task, not on the value of the child who should always remain invaluable.



### Key Steps

- Identify areas in your family's daily life that would benefit from a consistent routine.
- Establish routines WITH your child. Be open to creative, fun ideas to make routines enjoyable.
- Create routine charts WITH your young child.
- Assess as a family how the routine is working and readjust if necessary.
- Adults need to model following routines and following through on agreements.
- Set routines, but be flexible when it is necessary.
- Expect resistance. Remain calm and remind child of set agreements with no lectures. Walk away and cool off if you're angered; return and begin again.
- Offer appreciations, encouragement, and acknowledgement of effort.



**Positive Discipline Community Resources**  
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