



## Establishing Routines

A routine helps calm children and parents. Routines help your child develop self-control, independence, responsibility, and decision-making and problem-solving skills. When parents are caught in a rat race to beat the clock, chances are the child's anxiety also rises. Most people have a time of day when they function best. If you are not a morning person, organize a night-before routine to allow minimal thinking in your semi-conscious state of mind. If you prefer waking early, getting up 15 minutes earlier is easy to do and very beneficial if you are ready before the children wake up. Your children also fit into preferred types.

As a parent, you need to tune into their best time of day and adapt to it. Establishing routines often means breaking old habits, so you must first be committed to change. As a parent, you are setting the example for your child. Once you decide to change a pattern of behavior, stick to it.

Children need consistency. Your child will try many times to sway you back to the familiar pattern, but don't give up. It takes time and patience. Be sure your preschooler understands what you are doing. For example, choose a time when you are able to relax and sit down with your child. Say, "I really enjoy this time with you when we aren't rushing around like we were this morning."

### Bedtime Routine

There's a difference between putting a child to bed and putting a child to sleep. One is the parent's responsibility, and the other is the child's. Parents often don't have much energy at the end of the day, so to avoid conflict with an overly tired child, start early and develop an enjoyable routine. Once the child is in bed, the overwhelming feeling of the responsibility of parenthood decreases. Children may feel separated from their parents and the activity of the day at bedtime. Isolation, darkness and quietness make them feel insecure. Offer your 3-, 4- or 5-year-old guidance in helping him fall asleep, but lying down with him or putting him in your bed can create routines you may not appreciate later.

The bedtime routine should be positive for the parent and the child. A parent shouldn't feel trapped or resentful, and a child should go to bed calmly and safely and fall asleep on her own.

### Suggestions on Bedtime Routines

- Give the child transition time. Announce, "You have 10 minutes left to play before bedtime."
- Help the child identify time. "When the big hand gets to the top of the clock, it's time to wash your face and brush your teeth." Or, set a timer so she knows when time is up.
- Make up a bedtime ritual song. "This is the way we wash our face, wash our face, wash our face, so early in the evening." Other verses continue with what to do next, such as brush our teeth, take off our shoes.
- Make a picture chart or booklet of all the things that Bobby does before he goes to bed. It helps organize the routine.

- For a sense of security, encourage the child to choose a favorite animal, dad's sweater or another security item to take to bed. Night lights, reading lights or safe flashlights also add security.
- Allow some talk time to unwind. Read, sing or ask questions about the day. Be specific. "Did you see your friend Toby today?" Prepare for the next day. "The weather is going to be colder. Would you like to wear your red sweater or blue jacket tomorrow?"
- Pray with the child. Think of things to be thankful for and things that the child has expressed concern about.
- Make some rules about the number of stories or songs before bed so it isn't a method for stalling.
- Stop the popping. When children keep popping out of bed, say, "Stay in bed. I'll be back in 5 minutes to check on you." Return to check on the child before she pops out to check on you. Then the child can truly begin to relax and fall asleep.

Routines help children develop a sense of responsibility for their actions and respect for others. The rewards are many for parents since consistency in establishing routines helps children uphold rules and limits.

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