

Four Basic Routines for Children's Well-being

Why are Family Routines Important for my Children's Well-being?

Recent medical, economic, and social crises pose an ongoing threat to what is normal in children's lives. Many have experienced upsets in routines related to school, out-of-school activities and family life. You and your children have likely experienced these upsets.

Leaders of children organizations around the world agree that focusing on having and keeping routines is a necessary part of children's well-being during and after a crisis (Ager et al., 2010). Routines provide a sense of life being normal. They help children manage their feelings throughout the day (Fiese, 2006). For adults, routines contribute to a sense of shared purpose and identity (Fiese et al., 2002).

Family routines are an important part of coping with challenging situations. Examples of family routines include consistent meals, bedtimes, and recreation.

What Can we do to Help Our Children?

You can use the following four questions to rate the quality and consistency of your family's routines:

✓ **Do we do the same thing every morning during the work week?**

Ensuring that wake-up times and morning routines are consistent sets the tone for the day. Adequate nutrition should be considered in the morning routine.

✓ **Do we eat at the same time each day?**

Sharing consistent mealtimes together can help the family improve communication, discuss upcoming plans, and spend quality time with each other.



✓ **Are there consistent routines related to chores?**

Doing chores may not seem like quality time. However, when done consistently as part of a family routine, chores provide another context for quality *moments* to arise like jokes and games while folding laundry together (Kremer-Sadlik & Paugh, 2007).

✓ **Do children have special things they do or ask for every night at bedtime?**

Nighttime rituals may not be conducive to a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Make sure you are sensitive to what each child finds comforting or soothing as part of a nighttime routine. Being able to change routines to suit children's unique needs is an important skill.

If your answers to the four questions left you thinking, *we can do better or do more to support our children*, good. But, starting and maintaining routines can be challenging. So, think about these actions to get going:

Steps in Starting and Keeping Routines

1. Before making changes, talk to your family about how well the current routines are working.
2. Listen to everyone.
3. Agree to a new routine that everyone is willing to try.
4. Talk over what each person is expected to do. With some children, you may need to create signs or visual reminders of the new routine.
5. Give the new routine a try.
6. Talk again about how well the routine is working and make adjustments if needed.
7. Repeat steps 1-6 to work on another routine until you have worked on all four.

Work schedules, extended family obligations, and other external pressures can interfere with the consistency of routines even when your family wants to have regular ones. Just remember that every action you take toward quality and consistent family routines will help your children cope with feelings that arise when they experience stress.

It may be hard for your family to find large enough blocks of time for family game nights, movies, special outings, or other activities. If that’s true for your family, the four daily routines provide many opportunities for children to experience quality moments.

We know these routines work. Research suggests that children may gain security and positive well-being out of the spontaneous moments of being together. Those moments can happen during ordinary daily routines such as doing chores together.

Even if your family experiences chaos or uncertainty, routines can help your children manage their feelings and behavior more effectively (Fiese et al., 2006). Daily routines work because when children believe that their environment is comforting, safe, and predictable, they are more likely to show resilience during stressful times.



References

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