

The Importance of a Regular Routine to your Child

Regular schedules provide the day with a structure that orders a young child's world. Although predictability can be tiresome for adults, children thrive on repetition and routine. Schedules begin from the first days of life. Babies, especially, need regular sleep and meal programs and even routines leading up to those activities.

As they gets older, when a child knows what is going to happen and who is going to be there, it allows them to think and feel more independently, and feel more safe and secure. A disrupted routine can set a child off and cause them to feel insecure and irritable.

Dinnertime is a great place to start setting a routine. Sitting together at the dinner table gives children the opportunity to share their day and talk about their feelings. This is also a great time to include some responsibility in your child's routine, such as helping to set or clear the table.

And regardless of how exhausted you or your children may be, don't be tempted to skip winding down from the day. This is part of a nighttime ritual and allows both child and parent to decompress after a busy day. It also helps bedtime go more smoothly. This is usually the time of day when parent and child can spend some quality time together, so fight the urge to start the laundry or do the dishes until after the child has gone to bed. If this isn't possible, consider trading off these duties with your spouse each night to ensure your child has quality time with each parent on a regular basis. Take the time to find out what wind-down strategy works best for your child. Some children are actually energized instead of relaxed by a warm bath, so if that's the case with your child, bath time should be saved for a different time of day. Whatever routine you settle on, make it quiet, relaxing, and tranquil for everyone.

And though routines are essential, there should be some room to be flexible as well. You might be out late at night on a family outing, have unexpected company show up that may result in a skipped meal or nap in the car while running errands in the evening. In these instances, it's important for you to keep your cool. If you express frustration or anger about disrupting the routine, your child will as well. Prepare children for such unexpected events and show them that though it can happen from time to time, the routine will return the next day.