

The Importance of Routines

If you look at mine and my daughter's weekly routine in my Daily Home Planner, you might think that I'm completely crazy! I know my sister does! Routines are very important for me as well as for my daughter. Kids crave routines. It helps them to feel like they have some control over their lives. Harvey Karp, MD in his book "The Happiest Toddler on the Block" says

"Routines boost your child's feeling of understanding and belonging. Your toddler often feels surrounded by things beyond his control and words that everyone seems to understand but him. No wonder he sometimes feels frustrated and left out. (If you've ever visited a country where you didn't speak the language, you pretty much know what that's like.) Routines, however are a breeze to understand because they are so familiar. They give your child the same chance to know what's going on and what's coming up as anyone else in the family! They level the playing field.

"Routines help your toddler tell "time." Imagine you worked in an office that had no clocks or windows. It would be disorienting. (This is exactly what Las Vegas casinos do to keep you from realizing how much time you've spent gambling.) Routines help your toddler keep track of time and bring some predictability to the daily chaos: "After I wake up, I get dressed and eat breakfast. After lunch I take a nap," and so forth. They're like your toddler's wristwatch."

The last thing I'll say about the importance of routines for today is that when your children have no plan to their day they can get bored, and bored children will act out and misbehave. If you have things for them to do throughout the day they will stay happy and out of trouble! If you ever watch Nanny 911 or Supernanny, almost the first thing they do when they get to the family's home is to setup a routine for the family!

Now that you know the importance of setting up routines, we can talk about how to setup routines for different age groups.

Setting Children's Routines, Part I: 0-1 Year Olds

For the first couple of months of your baby's life they will set their own routine. They will eat and sleep pretty much whenever they want. This is a good chance for you to see what kind of routine you can create when they are at least a few months old. Babies will usually eat at the same time, and sleep at the same time every day. With the exception of teething and growth spurts when all routines get tossed out the window! Now that you understand what your baby prefers (what time they wake up and want to eat, etc). You can base their routine on that. It will change a few times as your baby gets older though, and starts sleeping less. Babies need about 15 hours of sleep a day until they are around 12 months old. Over half of your job is already done for you, once you figure out what times of day they get sleepy! Next schedule in their meals. Meals should probably take about 3-4 more hours out of the day for this age. Now there are only a few hours left to work with. This would be their awake time. You can plan fun activities for you to do. For smaller infants this can include singing games like itsy bitsy spider. Infants LOVE to watch you, so plan anything that allows them look at you. As your child gets a little older you can play different types of games since they can understand more things.

The most important thing about an infants routine is a set morning routine, and bedtime routine. Ever since Maddie was an infant she has had pretty much the same bedtime routine. First we give her a bath, then brush her teeth, then put on pajamas, then read a book, and then bed. She knows what is coming next and it helps her to know that she will be going to sleep very soon. She has the routine down now that she crawls into her bed after her story and goes to sleep all by herself! She knows the routine and can expect what is going to come next. The other part is a morning routine. We get up and snuggle on

the couch for a few minutes. Then eat breakfast and then change clothes for the day. This helps her to know that it's morning and time to start the day!

So, the short version is, infants will set their own routine for most of the day. You set the predictability of the rest!

Setting Children's Routines, Part II: 1-2 Year Olds

Your infant is growing up! They are walking, talking, playing! It is so much fun to finally be able to really play with your child. Now that they aren't sleeping most of the time, the routine needs to change. It is even more important at this age, when your child can't communicate effectively yet, to stick to their routine.

So what is the best way to figure out a routine for your little toddler? Again, you will start by the sleep schedule they naturally have fallen into. At this point, though, you can adjust it a bit to fit your schedule. Once you figure out the best time for you to have your child napping, make sure you put them down for their nap or naps (if you are lucky!), at that same time every day! Now find a bedtime that you can live with. Just as with the infant routine, the bedtime routine is essential for a happy bedtime. I haven't changed Maddie's bedtime routine since she was born, it still works. She takes a bath, brushes her teeth, puts on her pajamas, we say prayers, read a story and then she climbs right into bed. I encourage you to set a set routine of things you do at bedtime.

Now that we have sleep squared away, let's plan out the second constant. Meals. For toddlers I plan 3 big meals, and 2 snacks during the day. For us it's 7AM is breakfast, 10AM is snack, 12PM is lunch, 3 PM is snack, and 5:30pm is dinner. I plan about 30 minutes per large meal and 5-15 minutes for snacks. I have watched kids before, who constantly ask for snacks. When you have set times for the meals, your children will not overeat, be hungry for actual meals, and won't have to constantly hound you for a snack! If you say, no, it's not 10 yet, your child will understand because they NEVER get snacks unless it is at the designated time. I promise, your child isn't hungry all day. They will survive without the snack for another hour.

Now that the set things are squared away, it's time for the fun! There are three types of play that toddlers adore. They LOVE to be outside! The second my front door opens Maddie is running down the driveway. My sister says that Maddie is like a prisoner being set free! The truth is no matter how cold or hot it is, they hate to be cooped up in the same house day after day. There is only once that it was actually cold enough for Maddie to come back into the house after getting only to the start of the driveway, and it was 5 degrees out, she was barefoot, and in her pajamas! If she had warmer clothes on she most likely would have kept going. This isn't just when you go outside to run errands. This is strictly outside time for your child to explore the outdoors. Toddlers also love to be creative. I have mentioned before that my daughter LOVES to color. She also loves to paint. Dr. Harvey Karp says "Make a variety of art materials available to your little artiste. Don't bother showing him "how" to draw..." Lastly, toddler's love books. When I put Maddie down for her nap sometimes I will go check on her and she is just sitting by her bookshelf "reading" her books. I would try to schedule one or even all three of these types of play in for your child.

Schedule time with YOU! The last part of the routine should be set times where they have your undivided attention. This is when they can do anything they want and have you there to help them and play with them.

After all of that your day should be pretty packed! Have fun!

Setting Children's Routines, Part III: 3-5 Year Olds

You'll definitely notice a theme here if you've been reading this series, as I always start to set routines based on constants. Again, we are at a new stage in your child's life, so it's time to change up the routine again.

Let's start by setting their bedtime. You can make it a little later than when they were younger. This will be especially nice for them if they have a younger sibling already. That way they feel special because they get to stay up a bit later than their younger sibling. Make sure you schedule in time for their bedtime routine. I would still keep this the same as their 1-2 year routine. Now you can count 11-12 hours, and estimate the time they will be waking up. If you are lucky enough to still have them taking naps then you can estimate an hour or two for their nap, and pick a time during the day that it most makes sense for how tired your child will be at that time, and what else is going on with the family schedule. If they are done with naps scheduling some quiet time for your child is important for both of you. This gives them a chance to process the things they have experienced and learned so far that day.

Next we schedule in food. I would keep them on the same food schedule as when they were younger... Breakfast, Snack, Lunch, Snack, Dinner. That should take about 2 hours out of the day.

Now your child may start spending some time away from home in preschool! When picking a preschool, make sure their goals align with your own. Do you want your child to play more? learn more? interact with kids more? Find out where you stand and the preschool hours and decide what is best for you and your family.

Make sure you schedule in some one on one time with you and your preschooler. You can play, or read books, have some outside play time. Whatever makes your child feel happy and special.

Your child is also old enough to start helping around the house. Schedule in some chore time. Preschoolers should be able to pick up their toys, help fold clothes, put plastic items away from the dishwasher (as long as they can reach the location they are stored in), pick out their clothes (with some supervision), put dirty clothes in the wash, wipe the table.

It is also time to start teaching your child time management! My sister has a "peg" chart that has a smiley face sticker on one side, and nothing on the other side of the peg. The kids got to paint their own pegs. Each peg represents one thing they have accomplished that day. Her items are talents (if they practice their piano lesson, or dance moves), school (if they did their homework), spirit (if they said their prayers), and chore (obviously if they did their chores). Now a preschooler doesn't have homework, but she gets workbooks for her kids and has them do a page of the workbook as "homework." This will help your child to start to figure out how to organize their time as they try to get everything done.



All of this along with errands and regular family things, your child's day should be pretty packed again. Have fun planning!

Setting Children's Routines, Part IV: 5-11 Year Olds

So your child has officially started school! Wow, they grow up so fast, huh? You think to yourself... woo hoo! Freedom! See, there you would be wrong. Now it isn't so much about figuring out their daily routine. It is coordinating all of their appointments! My sister's (I really do talk about her a lot, it's because she's AWESOME!) monthly calendar blows mine out of the water! My calendar is chalk full for routines, but her's is chalk full of appointments! So how can we get all of this under control?

Start with sleep as always! This time though, it isn't going to be based on when you think your child needs to go to bed, or when they usually get sleepy. It will be based on what time school starts! Instead of starting with bed time, you need to figure out how long it will take you and your child to get ready in the morning and set their wake up time to allow for that. Now that you know what time they need to wake up in the morning, you can set their bedtime to allow for as much sleep as they need. Typically a 5-11 year old still needs about 10-11 hours of sleep every night. The bedtime routine should also change a bit now. I would add in things like laying out clothes for the next day, putting all homework and items that need to be brought to school in their backpack and setting the backpack by the door, etc.

Obviously schedule in dinner, the other constant (breakfast should already be taken care of during the morning routine, and lunch happens during school). Schedule in some time to do homework as well!! This typically works best 1 hour after school, or 1 hour before dinner. I wouldn't do it right after school to give them some time to "wind down".

The last part of their routine that I would include is activities, such as sports, music lessons, etc. whatever your child is interested in. How do you find out what your child will like best when there are so many choices?? I would say expose them to anything they want to try. A lot of places will let you sit in on a class to "check it out". I would find a place that does, and let them try different things. I'm sure it won't take long for them to really latch onto something. A word of caution about that though. DON'T OVERSCHEDULE YOUR CHILD!! Yes, that may sound funny coming from me, Miss I Have My 2 Year Old's Entire Day Scheduled To The Minute. I mean don't sign them up for too much. You want to still spend time as a family, and you don't want your child to become stressed out because they have too much to do.

Schedules will only continue to get more complicated as they get older, so sit back and enjoy the ride.

Setting Children's Routines, Part V: 12-15 Year Olds

I was about 12 when I had my very first paper planner. I even remember decorating it with patches I got in a Lucky Charms box. This is the age where you really start to let your children govern their own lives. It is a time of teaching and then letting them make their own choices. Hopefully they've heard some of the things you've said right? I would make a big deal about handing them the reigns to their life. This will help them to see that you trust them enough to do the right things.

Buy Them a Planner - Involve your child in this purchase. Would they prefer an electronic planner, a paper one and which type? I know Franklin Covey has paper planners that are geared towards Jr. High/High School students. (No link since they ARE my competition!) It is important that they like the planner well enough to actually carry and use it. The more they can customize it the better for them, usually (see Lucky Charms patches above).

Let Them Decide Their Schedule - After they have the planner sit down with them (as you are handing them the reigns), and decide what time they need to wake up in the morning. Ask them how long it takes them to get ready and then decide with them on a time to wake up. Let them choose what activities they want to participate in after school. Plan out their week WITH them. Make sure they have

times set for homework, chores, family time, and let them schedule in fun times like TV, video games, etc.

Teach Them - Now show them how to keep a to do list. Explain how when they get homework from their teacher they can write it in their planner so they make sure to not forget to do it when they get home. Also anything else that comes up during the day. Like if they find out in one of their classes that they need a permission slip for a field trip. Teach them how to write that down on their to do list so that they won't miss out on the field trip.

Help Them Keep On Track - Last thing you need to do is every once in a while check in to make sure they are doing everything they should be. I forget who said it, but someone said "Trust, but verify." Don't hound them every day if they aren't doing their homework when they have scheduled it. Maybe once a week at the beginning, and then less often as they get the hang of it. Remember, it may take them a little while to really have the self discipline to keep a schedule and to write down the things they need to accomplish.

As you give your children the tools they need to become young adults, they may just surprise you as to how mature they can really be!

Setting Children's Routines, Part VI: 16-18 Year Olds

This is the last post in this series! Now your kids are pretty grown up, so there really isn't much to plan out for them. Hopefully they are doing most of the planning themselves! I only have a couple quick tips to getting them fully prepared for the adult world.

Get a Job! - I don't think they should have a full part-time job, maybe just one or two days a week. I have met people in the professional world that have just graduated from college without working a day in their life (what can I say, we were in Orange County, CA). Most of the time these were the people that had the WORST work ethic! If you want to teach your children about showing up on time, not talking on your cell phone during work, etc, then make sure they get a job while they are young and still learning.

Help Them Create a Budget - With the money they will be making at their job, work out a good budget for them to follow. Make sure to allow plenty of play money, and savings! If they learn to live within their means now it will be much easier for them to do so when they are out on their own. DO NOT GET THEM A CREDIT CARD THAT YOU PAY!! That will not teach them anything. They can have their own checking account with a debit card, but that's IT! They are definitely not responsible enough to have a credit card, I wasn't responsible enough for a credit card at 20!

Update Their Planner - It's been a couple of years since your bought their planner, their personality may have changed, and knowing younger teens, it's probably thrashed. It's time for a new more grown up planner. Again, let them pick it out and let them figure out their schedule, with a little help from you.

That's it! I'm sure there are much more things you can do to help them become the young adults that they are. Give them a lot of responsibility and they will surprise you with how mature they can be!

Setting a Routine for YOU!

Just as it's important for your children to have structure to their day, it's definitely important for you to have structure. I think I would go crazy if I didn't have a plan for my day (or just watch TV all day). So how should you create a routine for you?

Again, we start with the constants. Sleep and eating! First figure out what time you want to go to sleep and wake up each day. That way you will know the time frame you are working with. If you are the primary care giver in your home, in addition to eating the meals, you need to schedule time to make the meals! Obviously breakfast and lunch will probably take less time to prepare than dinner. So make sure you are realistic in your preparation time. If you do want to schedule some extra prep time for breakfast and lunch you can start to prep dinner!

The fun part for a primary care giver will be to plan your routine around your children's routines. If you have scheduled special time with each of your kids (which I recommend), make sure you put it on your own calendar.

Errands will be a big one. I usually plan one grocery shopping trip in a week. I also plan a trip to a store like Target once a week to get toiletries and other things of that nature (toiletries are cheaper at those stores than the grocery store).

Cleaning - Make sure you break up your cleaning schedule so that you don't have to take an entire day to clean the house. I do a room or two a day. I also schedule in my "nightly sweep" to get the house ready for the next day.

Getting ready - You need to schedule time to get yourself ready for the day! If it takes you an hour to get completely ready (shower, makeup, etc), then schedule an hour.

Self Improvement - I like to schedule in a workout and some reading time. It can be anything you want to do just for you. This is time for you to work on goals, or write in a journal or blog. Again, ANYTHING!

Veg Time - OK, so I do love TV and movies, so I have to give myself a little time to just sit on the couch and watch! Gotta watch Bones on Tuesdays! I love that David Boreanaz!!

Work - If you work from home or work away from home, make sure to schedule time to work. This is especially important if you work from home. You could wind up not working at all or working all the time if you don't specify the times you will actually devote to working.

To Do's - On the days I don't have errands to run I like to work on my "TO DO List". Scheduling time for your To Do's is essential, I think, for getting things done!

Now it's time to crash back into bed, and snuggle up with the one you love. :) I'm sure you will feel much more productive each day as you follow a schedule. To keep your schedule handy and always in view check out the [Daily Home Planner's Weekly Routine feature!](#)