

Family routines

Some routine is helpful for all families. It helps you get through the things that need to be done each day, and can also build your family bonds. A good routine caters for the needs of all family members.

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The basics

Routines are how families organise themselves to get things done, spend time together and have fun. Every family has its own unique routines. Routines help family members know who should do what, when, in what order and how often.

For example, your family might have:

- daily routines for getting everyone ready in the morning, bath time, bedtime and mealtimes, greetings and goodbyes
- weekly routines for housework, like washing and cleaning
- other routines involving holidays and extended family get-togethers.

Family life might be more chaotic without some routine, but there's more to it than that. **Routines also let your children know what's important to your family.** Highly meaningful routines are sometimes called [rituals](#). These can help strengthen your shared beliefs and values, and build a sense of belonging and cohesion in families.



Maintaining normal daily routines as much as possible can make it easier for children to deal with stressful events, such as the birth of a new child, a divorce, the illness or death of a family member, or a move to a new city or country.

Why routines are good for children

Some children like and need routine more than others. In general, though, routine has the following benefits for children:

- They can be a way of teaching younger children healthy habits, like brushing their teeth, getting some exercise, or washing their hands after using the toilet.
- An organised and predictable home environment helps children and young people feel safe and secure.
- Routines built around fun or spending time together strengthen relationships between parents and children. Reading a story together before bed or going for a special snack after soccer practice can become a special time for you and your children to share.
- Daily routines help set our body clocks. For example, bedtime routines help children's bodies 'know' when it's time to sleep. This can be particularly helpful when children reach adolescence and their body clocks start to change. You can read more about [sleep in adolescence](#).
- If your child needs to take medicine regularly, a routine for this will help make both of you less



did you know ?

Consistent routines help young children develop healthy habits. They can make boring tasks like brushing teeth automatic.

likely to forget.

- Having an important job to do in the family routine helps older children and teenagers develop a sense of responsibility.
- Routines help develop basic work skills and time management.
- Routines can help promote a feeling of safety in stressful situations or during difficult stages of development, such as puberty.
- When children reach **adolescence**, the familiarity of regular home routines can help them feel looked after. Predictable family routines can be a welcome relief from the changes they're experiencing.
- [Routines for children with disabilities](#) can be a big help. They can be even more important for children who find it hard to understand or cope with change.



Routines have health benefits, too; children in families with regular routines have fewer respiratory infections than those in routine-free homes. This might be because routines contribute to healthy habits like washing hands. Routines might also help reduce stress, which can suppress the immune system.

Why routines are good for parents

Routines take some effort to create. But once established, they have lots of benefits:

- They free up time for you to think about other things while you work.
- Regular and consistent routines can help you feel like you're doing a good job as a parent.
- When things are hectic, routines can help you feel more organised, which lowers stress.
- A routine will help you complete your daily tasks efficiently.
- As children get better at following a routine by themselves, you can give fewer instructions and nag less.
- Routines free you from having to constantly resolve disputes and make decisions. If Sunday night is pizza night, no-one needs to argue about what's for dinner.



Older children and teenagers might grow out of, or challenge, some routines. **Being flexible and adapting routines** as your children get older can help with this issue. For example, changing routines for teenagers could be linked to milestones, such as them getting their first part-time job.

Kinds of routines

The routines adopted by families are as diverse as families themselves. Here are some routines you might want to consider for your family.

| Age group | You could have a routine for: |
|---------------------------|--|
| Toddlers and preschoolers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Getting ready in the morning● Going to bed at night● Regular 'playdates'● Eating meals● Regular play and talk times with a parent each day● Story time (book reading)● Quiet time each evening |

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| School-age children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hygiene and health – for example, brushing teeth and washing hands ● Tidying up, looking after toys ● Caring for pets ● Regular ‘playdates’ ● Pocket money, given at a regular time and day ● Helping with the laundry ● After-school activities ● Chores – for example, setting the dinner table, packing away, unpacking the dishwasher ● Hobbies or sport |
| Teenagers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using family resources like the computer and telephone ● Doing laundry or other chores ● Homework ● Hobbies or sport ● After-school activities ● Making beds and cleaning rooms |
| All ages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Preparing and eating meals together ● Family days (family activities) ● Family DVD nights ● Family meetings ● Taking turns talking about the day ● Special one-to-one time with a parent ● Regular contact with extended family and friends ● National/state/local celebration days, annual fetes or outings ● Saying prayers or observing religious events |

Using routines to solve family problems

There's no rule about how many or what kind of routines you should have. What works well for one family might be too restrictive for another. It can also be easy to over-timetable life.



Fourteen-year-old Stephen and his younger brother Aaron started nagging their mum Leanne about using the computer as soon as they got home from school every day. They then spent most of their afternoons fighting over it. Leanne came up with a new routine to solve the problem. The computer would be turned on at 5 pm; Stephen would go first, then help Aaron with his turn. The boys used a timer set to 30 minutes to time their turns. The result: the boys took on more responsibility, and there was a lot less tension at home.

If you're feeling you can't find the time to do the things you want with your children, some new routines might help. Try thinking about the following questions:

- What do you do regularly with your family? Would life be easier and more enjoyable if these things ran more smoothly?
- Could children and other family members be involved more? How could you set up routines to include them?
- Are there activities you would like to do but aren't doing? Can you include some of them in the family's regular routine?



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