



The Importance of Family Routines

Every family needs routines. They help to organize life and keep it from becoming too chaotic. **Children do best when routines are regular, predictable, and consistent.**

One of a family's greatest challenges is to establish comfortable, effective routines, which should achieve a happy compromise between the disorder and confusion that can occur without them and the rigidity and boredom that can come with too much structure and regimentation, where children are given no choice and little flexibility.

As a parent, review the routines in your household to ensure that they accomplish what you want. Here are some tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).



Weekday Mornings:

To make the household function well in the morning, everyone needs to know what has to be done to get ready for the day. Try the following:

- Put as many things in order as possible the night before.
- Keep wake-up routines cheerful and positive.
- Be sure your child eats breakfast, even if he or she is not hungry in the morning. *See [Breakfast for Learning](/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Breakfast-for-Learning.aspx) (/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Breakfast-for-Learning.aspx).*
- Finally, round out each morning by saying goodbye to your young child. A simple hug and a wave as he or she heads out the front door or slides out of the car are extremely important. They will give your child a positive feeling with which to begin the day's activities. *See [How to Ease Your Child's Separation Anxiety](/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Soothing-Your-Childs-Separation-Anxiety.aspx) (/English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Soothing-Your-Childs-Separation-Anxiety.aspx).*

After School:

During middle childhood, children need adult supervision. While some parents have their children return each afternoon to an empty home, these "latchkey" kids (</English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Staying-Safe-At-Home-Latchkey-Kids.aspx>) are more susceptible to misbehavior, risk-taking, and anxiety. For this age group, the AAP recommends that a child come home to a parent, other adult, or a responsible adolescent.

Evenings:

Dinner should be an important time for your family. As often as possible, all family members should eat together at the dinner table, without the distraction of television (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/Food-and-TV-Not-a-Healthy-Mix.aspx>) or radio. During dinner the family can share the day's activities and participate in enjoyable conversation. Everyone should be encouraged to take part, and negative comments and criticism should be discouraged.

Bedtime:

On school nights, children need a regular time to go to sleep. Lights can go out at different times for different children in the family, depending on how much sleep each child needs. Nighttime rituals can help ease a child to sleep. These rituals can include storytelling, reading aloud, conversation, and songs. Try to avoid exciting play and activities before bedtime. *See [Brush, Book, Bed: How to Structure Your Child's Nighttime Routine](/English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Brush-Book-Bed.aspx) (/English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Brush-Book-Bed.aspx).*

Weekends:

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Weekends are good times for family togetherness. You might go grocery shopping as a family, visit museums and zoos, do chores (</English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Chores-and-Responsibility.aspx>) that everyone participates in, go on hikes or bike rides (</English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/bicycle-safety-myths-and-facts.aspx>), or attend religious services. On weekends children in the middle years can usually be allowed a later bedtime than during the week. Keep in mind that, although family time is essential, it is equally important for parents to set aside some time just for themselves, too.

Additional Information from HealthyChildren.org:

- [Turning Family Time into Active Time \(/English/healthy-living/fitness/Pages/Turning-Family-Time-into-Active-Time.aspx\)](/English/healthy-living/fitness/Pages/Turning-Family-Time-into-Active-Time.aspx)
- [Bedtime Routines for School-Aged Children \(/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Bedtime-Routines-for-School-Aged-Children.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Bedtime-Routines-for-School-Aged-Children.aspx)

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