

THE CHILD HEALTH CONNECTION, INC.

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BALANCED LIFESTYLES: SCHEDULES AND ROUTINE

With the continuing pressures of two-income families, it becomes increasingly difficult for parents to balance quality family time with their jobs. We owe it to ourselves and our children's physical and mental health to make time together as nurturing and meaningful as possible. Schedules make settings predictable for both young children and adults. Routines create harmony and allow everyone the time and space they need to flourish as a family. There is comfort in the same old same old. So, for most families, schedules and routines are a must.

What are the Benefits of Having Schedules and Routines:

- Children thrive in a well-ordered and predictable environment where all caregivers consistently use routines.
- Daily routines provide opportunities for children to learn more about themselves, the world and other people.
- Children gain a sense of stability and a feeling of warmth and caring from their families and teachers when offered daily routines.
- Children will get a maximum satisfaction from what they are doing.
- When following routines, children feel a sense of mastery over their environments.
- Children who participate in daily routines develop and use skills in all developmental domains.
- Most young children are motivated to develop self-help skills they need to participate in routines.
- Children feel more secure if they know things will happen in a certain order and at set times.
- Routines help parents to cope with the daily stresses of parenting, make childcare easier and provide more free time.

Daily Routines Start at Home:

The challenge is to develop appropriate daily routines for children that offer a sense of consistency and security, yet remain flexible and responsive to the individual needs of the child and the family as a whole. Always be sure to include your child into your morning, evening and weekend routine.

- Mornings: Prepare for mornings the night before. Lay out clothing, get breakfast ready and pack lunches. You will feel more refreshed waking up knowing these are done.

- **Mealtime:** Make menus ahead for the whole week. Shopping and cooking will be less hurried. Include children in the task of making a shopping list, doing the shopping and preparing the meal.
- **Evenings:** Teach children to clean up after themselves. Encourage them to put their own toys away. Make it fun with a song or race against the clock.
- **Bedtime:** Bedtime routines are so important. Create a relaxed atmosphere with soft music, dim lighting, a place to snuggle and a favorite bedtime story.

The Childcare/Preschool Setting:

Remembering that consistency is very important, childcare providers should use a daily schedule in their classrooms. Establishing routines and planning a wide range of activities that encourage all areas of development help teachers capitalize on learning moments.

Things to remember when establishing schedules:

- Flexibility allows teachers to divert to other activities when children show interest or gain satisfaction. An extended play period may be just what the children need on any given day.
- Provide a healthy balance between group time and more solitary moments, quiet and noisy activities, indoor and outdoor play.
- Make transition times smooth and well-organized, not rushed and unpleasant. Allow a realistic amount of time for transitions to take place. It could help move the process along if favorable comments are made about the next activity.
- Avoid situations where all the children are expected to do the same thing at the same time.

Mealtimes Routines:

Make meal times positive experiences for children and teachers. Keep these strategies in the routine:

- Allow children to eat at their own pace. Do not use food as a reward or punishment.
- Make meals a time to chat, enjoy and help each other.
- It should be a time for children to be independent by making choices about foods.
- Encourage, but never force children to taste everything.

Naptime Routines:

This routine needs to convey warmth and security, not stress and turmoil. It is up to the child as to whether or not she sleeps. These are some ways to create a peaceful naptime routine.

- Have a winding-down period/quiet playtime.
- Alert the children at least ten minutes before naptime.
- Play soothing, rhythmic music before and during naptime. Keep the volume low.
- Read a story.
- Decrease external stimuli, encourage soft voices.
- Use relaxation methods such as backrubs for children who may be overtired.

Toileting Routine:

Most children develop toileting skills sometime around their second year. It is a necessary social skill. It takes time, understanding and lots of patience.

- Communicate with parents about the toileting routine at home.
- Avoid power struggles . . . let the child decide if they want to sit on the potty.
- Avoid using rewards for toileting success. When children have accidents they can become anxious and feel a sense of failure.
- Encourage children to use the toilet after meals, before going outside, before and after naps.

Keep in mind there is no set age at which toilet training should begin. It depends on each child's physical and emotional development.

Organizing the day with daily routines/schedules will help parents and get much more out of their time and children will be happier. Knowing what's coming up can give everyone a better sense of control.

Resources:

Infant/Toddler Sleep: Bedtime and Naptime. The Child Health Connection, Inc., March 2009.

Partnering With Families to Provide Balanced Lifestyles. The Child Health Connection, Inc. June 2006.

www.pbs.org/wholechild/providers/little/html.