

WHY ARE ROUTINES IMPORTANT?

Maintaining regular routines provides a sense of order to daily life. It lets everyone know when the day begins, what activities will occur when and where, and what role everyone is expected to play. For example, who is going to set the table tonight? Who is going to set out the garbage on Monday night? While these might seem like fairly mundane activities they can create feelings of control and self-efficacy.

ARE THERE CERTAIN ROUTINES TO MAINTAIN?

There are at least three family routines to maintain: bedtime and sleep, mealtime, and physical activity.

BEDTIME AND SLEEP ROUTINES

There is considerable evidence that getting a good night's sleep is essential to health and wellbeing. One of the ways to insure good sleep hygiene is to set a regular bedtime and stick to it. For younger children, this means creating a routine prior to going to bed, such as baths, reading a book, and prayers. For older children and youth this may mean setting a time when to disconnect from electronics and phones. There is a no one size fits all approach to bedtime routines—try and keep it short about 10-15 minutes (excluding bath).

MEALTIME ROUTINES

Families that practice regular and meaningful mealtime routines tend to have children and youth who are both physically and mentally healthier. Although we cannot state a direct cause and effect for sharing meals together and health outcomes, there are some essential ingredients of positive shared meals.

First, set a regular time and place for the meal. This does not mean that you have to eat exactly at a precise time! It is important to have flexibility as

well. However, a thirty minute window is reasonable. Having a regular gathering place also allows everyone to know where they are expected to be at the set aside time.

Second, encourage open conversation and communication during the meal. Although you might have spent the entire day with everyone at home, this might be a good time to share stories about relatives who you can't be with or maybe have silly question of the day such as "If you were a vegetable what would it be?"

Third, respond to negative emotions in a measured and responsive way. Not all mealtimes are as smooth and calm as depicted on TV. Spend a few moments asking why a child or youth is upset, reflect their emotions, consider problem solving away from the table, and then move on if possible.

Fourth, turn off all electronic devices. Being distracted during meals by watching television, talking on the phone, or playing with tablets may undo the beneficial effects of sharing meals. Playing soothing music may be beneficial.

SHARED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Sharing physical activity together as a family can reduce stress and improve health and wellbeing—especially outside. While there might limited access to regular sites for organized sports, families can be creative in how they are active together. Even walking in the neighborhood where there are familiar sights can be helpful to both parents and children.

Some possible activities include having a scavenger hunt (inside or outside), planting a garden (once the weather is warm enough), balloon toss, and taking a walk to note new plants and flowers blooming every day.



CREATING A FAMILY SCHEDULE

Planning a schedule for the day (or week) may be helpful for some families with children who thrive on consistency and predictability. Schedules can be especially helpful for children with autism, ADHD, or other developmental disabilities. A picture schedule can be written out or drawn with help from children. This way you can make sure that more important things (including taking some time for yourself) gets prioritized. For some families, the schedule might just be a guide that could be modified or changed if families are flexible.

SOME ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We have provided online resources that may be useful to you and your family. These websites are typically evidence-based sites that incorporate the latest science and practice and do not include commercial venues.

SLEEP RESOURCES

sleepfoundation.org/articles/perfecting-your-childs-bedtime-routine

sleepfoundation.org

[healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/sleep/Pages/Healthy-Sleep-Habits-How-Many-Hours-Does-Your-Child-Need.aspx](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/sleep/Pages/Healthy-Sleep-Habits-How-Many-Hours-Does-Your-Child-Need.aspx)

MEALTIME RESOURCES

familyresiliency.illinois.edu/resources/mealtime-minutes

[healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Food-and-TV-Not-a-Healthy-Mix.aspx](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Food-and-TV-Not-a-Healthy-Mix.aspx)

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RESOURCES

nemours.org/services/health/growuphealthy/activity/families.html

heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/getting-active/daily-tips-to-help-keep-your-family-active

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES IN STRESSFUL TIMES

extension.illinois.edu/global/family-life

EVIDENCE BASE (SELECTED)

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Mindell, J. A., & Williamson, A. A. (2018). Benefits of a bedtime routine in young children: Sleep, development, and beyond. *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, 40, 93-108.

Walsh, F. (2006) *Strengthening family resilience*. NY: Guilford

**For more information, visit:
go.illinois.edu/buildingblocks**

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