



Routines Summary

Why Routines?

Routines not only help your family move through the day smoothly and on time, they can have a significant impact on your child's success. Two-year-olds are learning about their world, trying to make sense of how things work, and exploring what the boundaries are. Routines can provide structure and repetition that makes their world easier to understand.

Tip These steps are best done when you and your child are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and actively building a healthy parent relationship will support these steps.

Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- Consider your routines throughout the day - morning, mid-day, and bedtime. Creating routines around wakeup time, mealtime, naptime, bedtime, trips back and forth to child care, checking the mailbox, and going to the grocery store can make these times predictable, comforting, and fun for your child. Involve your child in creating routines around these common times by asking questions.
 - *"Would you like to brush your teeth before or after your bath?" "What song would you like me to sing before you fall asleep?"*
- Each time there is an opportunity, ask your child, *"How do you feel? How do you think I feel?"* Two-year-olds do not yet have an emotional vocabulary and are not able to describe their body sensations when they are upset or dealing with any big feeling. Changes in their routines are a great place to explore feelings, but they will need your support to be successful.
 - For example, if your child is making a disagreeable facial expression, notice and name the feeling. *"I noticed that when I told you we were going to do something different today, your eyebrows squished down and your face was red. Were you feeling mad?"*
- Practicing naming emotions will enable your child to identify their own feelings as well as others and seek support when they need it. This can help reduce the length and strength of tantrums as your child gains emotional competence.
- When reading books, point out routines that seem comforting and moments when those routines changed. Talk about what you notice. *"I noticed the duck in this story likes to go with her mom to get the mail everyday"* or *"The duck seems scared to try something different."*

Tip Your child will give you lots of cues about whether the routines you develop feel too complicated or too simple and if they are being followed consistently enough for your child to feel a sense of security. Every child is different, and your own child may change from day-to-day in how willing they are to follow a routine or how much help they need to manage planned and unplanned changes in routines.

Step 2. Teach New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Narrate your daily routines: *"I am getting lunch ready. I think we'll have milk with our lunch. Does that sound yummy to you?"*
- Make your thinking and feelings explicit. Talk about what you notice, how you are feeling, and why you are feeling it. *"I love that we always start our morning with a big hug and then eat eggs for breakfast together. It is my favorite time of the day. It feels so good that I always know that when I wake up we will do our good morning routine together. Do you remember when we ran out of eggs and we had to eat cereal for breakfast? I like our usual egg breakfasts, but it was fun to try something different."*
- Talk aloud about the ways in which you respond to your own big feelings: *"I was a little scared when our plans changed, but everything worked out, and I feel so much better now."*
- Grow confidence. In addition to having consistent daily routines with your child, point out when they are following the routine on their own and when they are able to manage changes in the routine: *"I noticed that you knew we needed to wash our hands before eating lunch."* When something is different you might say, *"I noticed that you knew your favorite blanket was in the wash and you just picked up a different one to cuddle with. You knew how to handle that change."*
- If your child is worried about a change, for example, and uses definitive language like, "No," you may respond with:
 - *"This is something different, and I know we can do it."*
 - *"Do you remember last time when we didn't have your favorite pajamas, and you had to wear something different to bed? You took a deep breath and were able to do it."*
 - *"I wonder if we can do something that will help us feel better?"*

Step 3. Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Learn about your child's development. Each new age presents different challenges. Being informed about your child's developmental milestones promotes your empathy and patience.
- Engage in routines together like picking up toys before snacktime or hanging up your coats when you come inside. Allow your child to engage with you in routines.
- Be sure to consider how you can create the conditions to support their success like having them practice routines alongside you. *"I like to put my coat on a hanger in the closet. Would you like to put your coat right beside mine?"*
- Initially, practice may require more teaching, but avoid taking over and doing it for your child.
- Once your routines feel comfortable and consistent, provide opportunities for your child to change the routine. *"I've noticed that we really enjoy reading bedtime stories together and we have enough time to read more than one book. Do you think we should start reading two books before going to bed?"* The goal is to feel a sense of security from being able to predict what happens each day, but to also feel comfortable with change.

- Use your child's dolls or stuffed animals to act out your routine, especially if it is new or if it is changing. This is a good way to practice mastering the steps of the routine. If you know a change is coming up you can act out that change with dolls and stuffed animals so that your child can begin to experience what that change will feel like.

Step 4. Support Your Child's Development and Success

- Use "Show me..." statements and ask them to demonstrate how they can work through a routine with you. *"Let's put on our pajamas to get ready for bed. Can you show me which pajamas you want to wear?"*
- Don't move on quickly if your child shows interest in trying something new. Children often need more time to stick with a challenge or pursue a goal. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to show you they are competent. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they are able to gain skills over time.
- Recognize effort by using "I notice..." statements like: *"I noticed how you picked a book for us to read as part of our bedtime routine."*
- On days with extra challenges, routines can feel especially comforting. When the house is full of visitors, and there are a lot of changes in your normal routine, still follow your morning routines like singing your good morning song or taking a walk around the neighborhood using the same path you normally use. This will help your child feel confident even with new people, and they will feel less stressed because they will know what to expect.
- Actively reflect on how your child is feeling when they have mastered a routine or when they are facing a change. You can offer reflections like:
 - *"I see you have grabbed the book you want to read before bed. You know exactly what to expect next."* Naming their success will help to build confidence.
 - *"There is a new person reading the book at storytime today. You can sit with me until you feel comfortable if you want to."* Noticing your child's concerns and coming up with strategies for facing them will help your child know that you are there to help them get through this change of plans.

Step 5. Recognize Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Recognize and call out when it is going well. *"I noticed that you put your socks in the laundry basket when you took them off. That's very helpful!"*
- Recognize small steps along the way: *"You put your blocks in the bin when it was time to clean up. I like seeing that!"*
- Build celebrations into your everyday routine. Promote joy and happiness by laughing, singing, dancing, hugging, and snuggling to appreciate one another.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2020). *Routines Summary. Age 2*. Retrieved from <https://www.ParentingMontana.org>.



Brought to you by the Offices of Child Care, SAMHSA, and DPHHS. The views and opinions contained in the publication do not necessarily reflect those of SAMHSA or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and should not be construed as such.