



Routines Summary

Why Routines?

Establishing regular routines can help your family get through the day cooperatively while building vital skills in your child. Routines can help your child feel safe because they know what to expect and are better able to learn from the rich experiences you share together every day. Changes to your routine - expected and unexpected - can help your child learn to be flexible and practice adjusting to new situations when you guide them with confidence and sensitivity.

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

Tip Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.

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

- *“Let’s think about our typical day. What do we need to do when we get up in the morning?”* (brush teeth, eat breakfast)
 - *“What do we like to do in the morning?”* (watch a program, play)
- *“What can be challenging when it’s morning, and we are trying to get to school on time?”* (Ask key questions about those specific challenges to really understand what’s challenging for your child.)
 - *“I notice you tend to slow down when it’s time to get dressed. Why is that time a struggle for you?”*
- Each time there is an opportunity, ask your child, *“What do you notice? How do you feel?”* If your child is feeling unsure about how to describe their emotions when a routine changes, consider asking questions, naming what you notice, and leaving plenty of quiet space after your questions so they have an opportunity to share their ideas.
 - *“How did you feel when I told you we were going to do something different today?”*
- When reading books, point out routines that seem comforting and moments when those routines changed. Ask, *“How do you think that character is feeling? What happened when their day changed?”*

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

- After talking about the routine and its challenges in Step 1, brainstorm solutions to your identified challenges. For example, when talking about your morning routine, you may have identified that you tend to start nagging when it's time to get dressed. Generate ideas together.
 - *"What exactly about getting dressed is a struggle for you?"*
 - *"What ideas do you have to deal with those struggles?"*
- Now write down or draw your plan with each simple step. Let your child do the writing or drawing so that they feel a sense of ownership in the plan you are developing.
 - For ages 5-7: Get out a poster board, newsprint paper, or just plain paper and markers. Have your child or children write out their routine in the simplest terms such as: 1. Wake up! 2. Get dressed. Young children can draw instead.
 - For ages 8-10: Create a checklist together of their routine on a whiteboard or chalkboard. Children at this age enjoy checking off a list.
- Post their plan in a visible location.
- Teach your child how to perform the routine. Particularly if there are new responsibilities or challenges, be sure that you've tried those steps out together first.
 - There is a simple process called interactive modeling that teachers use that can become a powerful teaching tool for parents.^{^1}
 - Say what you will model or demonstrate and why.
 - Model or demonstrate the behavior.
 - Ask your child what they noticed.
 - Invite your child to try it.
 - Ask what they noticed with their own modeling.
 - Practice together.
 - Provide specific feedback starting with strengths using *"I notice..."* statements.
- Make your thinking and emotions explicit: *"I love that you help me prep our dinner each night. It is one of my favorite times of the day because I get to spend time with you."*
- Talk aloud about the ways in which you respond to your own big feelings: *"It made me feel so much better to tell you how I was feeling and to ask for help."*
- Grow confidence: *"I noticed that you have been following your plan to get your backpack ready for school the night before so you don't feel rushed in the morning."*

Trap Don't create the plan when you are either in the routine itself, are hungry or tired, or have time pressures.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Learn about your child's development. Being informed about your child's developmental milestones promotes your empathy and patience.
- Allow your child the chance to try out the routine, taking responsibility for their own tasks -- even when you know you could do it faster and better.
- Be sure to consider how you can create the conditions to support their success (like making sure they wake up with enough time to complete their morning routine).
- If there is part of a routine that is not working, talk with your child about ways that you might change your plan for it to work better. *"It seems to take a really long time for you to decide which books to read for bedtime. I am usually feeling tired then, and it is hard for me to be patient while you choose. Is there something we can do to help you choose the books more quickly? Could we choose them in the morning? What do you think we should try tonight?"*
- Initially, practice may require more teaching, but avoid taking over and doing it for your child.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child's Development and Success

- Use "Show me..." statements and ask them to demonstrate tasks or even the whole routine for you. When a child learns a new skill, they are eager to show it off!
- Recognize effort by using "I notice" statements like, *"I notice how you went in to brush your teeth after breakfast without me asking. That's taking responsibility!"*
- On days with extra challenges that make completing routines harder, proactively remind your child to help them be successful. In a gentle, non-public way, you can whisper in your child's ear, *"Remember our next step? What is it?"*
- Actively reflect on how routines are going. You can ask questions like:
 - *"How are you feeling when it's time to get dressed? Is it working to select your clothes in the morning? Or, do you need to set them out the night before?"*
 - *"Seems like you got to bed later than we hoped last night. Were you feeling tired today? Did you have a hard time paying attention in class?"*
- Apply logical consequences when needed. Logical consequences should come soon after the negative behavior and need to be provided in a way that maintains a healthy relationship. Rather than punishment, a consequence is about supporting the learning process. First, get your own feelings in check. Not only is this good modeling, when your feelings are in check you are able to provide logical consequences that fit the behavior. Second, invite your child into a discussion about the expectations established in Step 2 for the routine. Third, if you feel that your child is not holding up their end of the bargain (unless it is a matter of them not knowing how), then apply a logical consequence as a teachable moment.
- Don't move on or nag. Children often need more time to perform tasks that challenge them even if you believe they are simple and don't require much time. 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 do what you need them to do.

Trap Logical consequences should not be used as a threat to get your child to complete their routines. Threats harm the relationship with your child and decrease your child's decision-making skills.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Recognize and call out when it is going well. It may seem obvious, but it's easy not to notice when all is moving along smoothly. When children are completing their homework tasks on time, for example, a short, specific call out is all that's needed: *"I notice you completed your homework today on your own in the time we agreed upon. Yes! Excellent."*
- Recognize small steps along the way. Don't wait for the big accomplishments - like the full bedtime routine to go smoothly - in order to recognize effort. Remember that your recognition can work as a tool to promote more positive behaviors. Find small ways your child is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, after getting through your bedtime routine, snuggle together and read before bed. Or, in the morning once ready for school, take a few minutes to watch a favorite cartoon together. Include hugs, high fives, and fist bumps as ways to appreciate one another.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2020). *Routines Summary*. Ages 5-10. Retrieved from <https://www.ParentingMontana.org>.