

## ***Helping Kids Thrive on Routine***

“My only secret is that I always bear in mind what my father said: Do the smallest things in daily routine with enthusiasm and sincerity.”—Nerrisa Ng, artist

Whenever kids have time off, such as during the summer or the holidays, it's easy for them to get out of a regular routine. All of their habits—from sleeping to eating to taking care of themselves—get out of whack. But routines are important to help kids thrive. Kids do better when they eat healthy foods at regular intervals, get enough sleep, get some physical activity, and know what to expect from their days. Routines help to ground them and give them a sense of security. Here are some ideas to helping kids understand the importance of everyday routines.

### ***Try it...***

#### ***For all parents\****

- Talk about routines and why they're important. For example, ask kids how they feel when they don't get enough sleep: What happens the next day? Child and adolescent experts say that having a predictable routine is key to helping kids succeed. Routines involve getting up in the morning, getting dressed, eating meals and snacks, helping out at home, personal hygiene, taking medication for chronic conditions, getting ready for bed, and sleeping. Kids who live in homes that don't have predictable routines often have a hard time making transitions from one activity to the next, taking care of themselves, and following the signals their bodies give them.
- Model a lifestyle that has a predictable routine. What's your morning routine? How often do you sit down for a meal? How many hours of sleep do you usually get? What are your kids learning from you?
- Although routines are better if they're predictable, also work to make them fun and creative. Have family members occasionally sit in a different place at the dinner table. Stick a note saying you're thinking of your child in his or her lunchbox. When you're doing a family chore together, occasionally take a break to dance to a fun song.
- If you have joint custody, talk with your ex about daily routines for your kids. Try to create predictable routines that you both can agree on.
- Whenever you (or your child) move from time off back to a regular routine, try easing back into it slowly. For example, start getting up 30 minutes earlier every day until you're back at your usual schedule. It's often easier to get up earlier than to try to go to bed when you're not tired.
- Encourage your child to help other family members with their daily routines, such as reading a book aloud to a sibling, calling a grandparent to wish him or her goodnight,

or walking the dog.

### ***For parents with children ages birth to 5***

- Respond immediately to infants' cries and meet their needs. By the time infants are three months old, many have established a daily rhythm. Sleeping through the night is one of the first boundaries you can set once children are physically able to do so.
- Have your children participate in meaningful ways during regular routines. They can put out napkins and cups at dinner time, help pick up toys before you vacuum the floor, and choose books for bedtime reading.
- As children get older, expect them to balk at daily routines. Some will refuse to eat during meals. Others will resist taking a bath. Try creative ideas to entice them to do these activities, such as getting down on the floor on all fours and having your child ride you like a camel to the bathtub.
- If your child attends a child-care center or preschool, ask for a copy of the daily schedule. On weekends, try to follow it so your child knows when it's naptime, lunchtime, and playtime.
- Read aloud a picture book to your child every night before bed.

### ***For parents with children ages 6 - 9***

- Don't be surprised if children find the daily school routine exhausting at first. Many come home the first week—and even the first month—needing a nap. Let them incorporate a nap into their daily routine if they need to.
- Continue talking about healthy eating habits during meals. As children get older, they often crave foods that are unhealthy. Set limits on unhealthy foods and don't keep many in the house.
- Even when your child starts to read, continue reading a book (or a chapter of a book) before bed. Give your child a choice: you read, he or she reads, or the two of you take turns.

### ***For parents with children ages 10 - 15***

- Kids at this age start to resist many (if not all) aspects of daily routines. Be patient when they push the boundaries, but continue to be firm about why routines are important. For example say, "Getting a good night's sleep helps you be more alert during the day." "Getting exercise makes you healthy." "Flossing your teeth helps prevent cavities."
- Be open about new hygiene routines that your child needs to adopt as he or she grows, such as using deodorant, shaving, brushing and flossing in new ways with braces, wearing headgears and retainers, and so on.
- At this age, kids tend to push the boundaries with sleepovers. Don't be surprised if they stay up all night. Be clear about what they can and cannot do during these sleepovers (such as staying in the house, not making noise to wake up others, and not calling friends after a certain time).

### ***For parents with children ages 16 - 18***

- A number of teenagers easily get sick and some come down with mononucleosis

because they get overly tired. If your teenager chronically goes to bed late, try these tips (from ParentingTeensOnline):

- \* Tell them there's a new policy in the house on bedtime and wake time
  - \* Give them a week or so leeway to adjust to it
  - \* Don't immediately drive them to school when they miss the bus
  - \* Take away other privileges, like cell phones or Internet access if they refuse or won't comply
  - \* Offer an incentive for consistently on-time behavior.
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- Learn to let go. Older teenagers are becoming more independent, and they'll make choices about eating, sleeping, and how they spend their time. Talk about any concerns you have, but let them make their own choices. If their choices affect you, be clear about that. You can't make a teenager eat with you or go to bed at a certain time, but you can say that it's important that the only noise going on during meals is at the family table and that your home needs to be quiet for those sleeping between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. (or whatever time you set).
  - Monitor your teen's health and encourage good health habits, such as eating right, having down time, and exercising. Although many teens throw out good health habits, keep modeling good health habits yourself. Invite your teenager to try new foods (or eat more fruits and vegetables). Encourage your teenager to join you for a family walk (or workout). Talk about why a regular routine helps individuals be at their best.