

Routines for a Great Day!



Adam looks forward to big hugs from his parents each morning. Stephanie's favorite part of the afternoon is when her mom picks her up from day care and asks about her projects. And Miguel knows he can count on a cozy bedtime story every evening.

These youngsters' days go smoothly because they expect familiar, comforting rituals. A daily routine can help your child behave well, develop good character, and stay connected with you. Try these tips for successful mornings, afternoons, and evenings.

Morning

A warm wake-up

Let your little one know you're happy to see her when she wakes up. You might come up with a special way to say, "Good morning." It can be simple ("Get out of bed, sleepy-head") or silly ("Rise and shine, porcupine!"). Your youngster will look forward to hearing your greeting first thing, and that can set the tone for a peaceful day. *Idea:* Learn greetings in other languages, and surprise each other with different ones. The next time your family visits the library, you could look up "Good morning" in bilingual dictionaries. Or ask friends who speak other languages to teach you greetings.



Morning announcements

Children often behave better if they know what's ahead. Try putting your youngster in charge of announcing the day's events at breakfast. When he comes into the kitchen, he can look at the calendar to see if it's a special day (cousin's birthday, a holiday) or if anyone has a dentist appointment or sports practice. This is also a

good time for you to go over any schedule changes ("Remember, Katie's mom is picking you up from school today").

Snappy dressing

Checking the weather the night before will save time in the morning. Plus, your child will feel grown-up when he learns to choose the right clothes all by himself. Let him look at the forecast in the newspaper or on a computer or phone. Talk about whether he will need short or long sleeves, pants or shorts, a sweater or a light jacket. *Tip:* Be sure he always puts his clothes in the same spot (say, on his nightstand or on a chair) so he can find them easily in the morning.

After school

Catching up

To find out what your youngster did in school or day care, ask her to show you what's in her bag. Talk about each item. ("Can you tell me about this map you drew?" or "How did you choose those colors for your painting?") Expressing interest in what she's learning will show her that school is important and help her take pride in her work. If she doesn't have much to say, start talking about your own day ("Today I took a fun new dance class at the gym"). She might decide she wants to share, too!



continued



Running errands

Chances are that part of your child’s routine will be to accompany you on errands. Make things more pleasant with on-the-go activities. While you wait in line at the bank, let him count coins or practice writing numbers on a blank deposit slip. At the gas station, ask him to identify the letters (“s-t-a-r-t”) or words (“on”) on the pump.

Physical activity

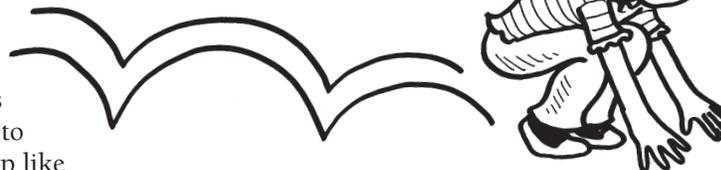
Make exercise a regular part of your youngster’s day by encouraging her to play outside after school or day care. Provide active toys like a jump rope, a hula hoop, roller skates, and a variety of balls. *Idea:* You might see if several neighborhood parents can take turns supervising children riding bikes or playing tag outside.

Terrific transitions

It’s not always easy for little ones to stop one activity and start another. These clever ideas can make switching gears easier.

● **Keep good-byes pleasant.** Does your child sometimes have a hard time making the transition from home to school or day care? Try arriving in the classroom or building a few minutes early, and name something she can look forward to. (“It’s nice out today—you’ll be able to play on the playground again!”)

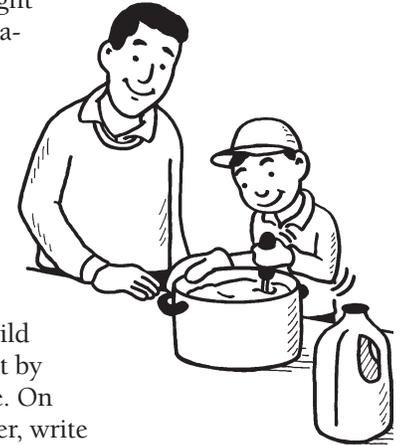
● **Be creative.** Let your youngster decide how to move from one place to another. You might say, “It’s time to go. Would you like to walk like an elephant or hop like a frog on our way to the car?”



Evening

Dinnertime

Regular family meals help parents and children stay close. You can enjoy time with your youngster by letting him help you cook. He might make fruit salad, mash potatoes, or arrange rolls on a cookie sheet. While you eat, be sure to compliment him on foods he helped prepare.



Chore basket

When everyone pitches in, your home is a nicer place to live. Keep your child interested in doing her part by turning chores into a game. On index cards or slips of paper, write jobs she can do by herself (dust, use a handheld vacuum, fold towels and washcloths). Let her illustrate each one. Every day, look through the cards and put the chores that need to be done in a basket. Then, she can close her eyes and pull one out.

Story hour

Make reading the focus of bedtime. You’ll help your youngster learn to love reading—and he’ll be eager to get ready for bed. Try saying, “Fifteen minutes until story time!” (instead of “It’s bedtime”). Tell him you’ll meet in his room after he puts on his pajamas and picks out a book. Then, shut out all distractions (close the bedroom door, put away your phone), and enjoy a story together.

● **Use a timer.** Show your child how to set a timer by himself, and explain what the numbers mean. (“The first number is a three—that’s three minutes. When it gets to zero, we’re going to T-ball.”) Then, place it near him so he knows how much time is left to play.

● **Sing songs.** Music can make anything more fun. Your youngster might pick up her toys to a special cleanup song. Or the two of you could invent words to “The Wheels on the Car” (to the tune of “The Wheels on the Bus”) while you drive from one place to another.

Early Years