

The importance of routines and sleep



Routines are important for adults. They help us to be organised; give us confidence because we know what we are doing; plus provide structure to our days. But for children, routines have a big role to play in their physical development.

Routines can help children in a number of ways:

- All children have physical care needs from the very youngest babies to those children at school. For a baby or child, routines are a great way to meet these needs whether it be feeding, nappy changing, toileting, dressing or sleeping
- For children to feel safe and secure; they need to form good attachments to parents and carers and need to trust they will be looked after - having a daily routine is a great way of doing this
- Through routines, children can learn to establish confidence and self-awareness through knowing what is happening and how they are part of the routine; as well as physical skills through activities, such as, tidying up at lunch time
- They can start to identify vocabulary associated with time e.g. before, after, now. They also learn sequences and order
- Children can recognise familiar patterns and events and learn to distinguish between the unfamiliar.

Routines should not be seen as boring!

While they are important, parents need to be flexible where needed, after all any routine should help not hinder, and by adapting it to daily life, it will help ensure children view them as a positive experience.

The golden rule



Children often respond well to routines and there are ways you can get them actively involved:

- Talk to babies and children as you dress, feed and change them, tell them what is coming next
- Establish certain sequences and places e.g. tea, bath, milk and bed with story
- Make routines fun i.e. tidy up songs and getting dressed songs
- Use pictures, games and calendars to show routines
- Organise your day so that it best fits in with your child's needs such as sleep
- Give children warning when routines or elements of routine are changing

The importance of sleep

Sleep is one of the most important aspects of a child's routine. Well-rested children are happier children, more willing to participate and engage in the activities around them.

Sleeping is essential for development, particularly brain development. Sleep (or lack of it) is also a major concern and topic of conversation for parents, particularly with very young children.

This is often an area of diverse approaches; some families may follow a regimented sleeping schedule, others will be much more relaxed allowing their children to sleep as and when they need to.

According to the Children's Sleep Charity, sleep deprivation has a huge impact on emotional, physical and mental health. All children are individuals when it comes to how much sleep they need but the below provides some guidance:

Age	Average daytime hours	Average night-time hours
3 months	5	10
6 months	4	10
9 months	2 ³ / ₄	11 ¹ / ₄
12 months	2 ¹ / ₂	11 ¹ / ₂
2 years	1 ¹ / ₄	11 ³ / ₄
3 years	1	11
4 years	0	11 ¹ / ₂

The charity recommends the following to promote sleep:

- Consider routines and spend some time preparing a child for a nap, just as you would at bedtime. Reading a story in a calm environment can be helpful when they are tired
- Use neutral colours in bedrooms that aren't over-stimulating; creams and pastel shades are helpful
- If possible use the same sleeping environment for the child. Getting into the routine of falling asleep in the same place each day will help them to feel more secure
- Always follow safe sleep practices. Details of the latest information and research is available from the Lullaby Trust
- Fine motor skill activities can be very relaxing in the run up to naptime, for example threading, playdough, jigsaw puzzles, colouring
- Ensure that the room is at an appropriate temperature, ideally it should be between 16-20°C.

All too often parents try and ensure that a child is kept awake during the day, particularly if they aren't sleeping well at night time. But this can be counter-intuitive.



According to the Children's Sleep Charity preventing a child from taking a daytime nap can make a sleeping issue worse, causing the child to become increasingly sleep deprived and finding it harder to fall asleep at night time. A well scheduled daytime nap is an excellent way of promoting a better night's sleep.

More information

[Children's Sleep Charity](#)
[Lullaby Trust](#)

PACEY (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years) pacey.org.uk/parents