What is a routine?

Routines are how families organise themselves so they can get things done, spend time together and have fun. Whether your household is easy-going or super organised, every family has its own ways of doing things. So setting up a routine should reflect how your family operates.

Routines can be:

- **Daily routines** for getting ready in the morning, bath time, bedtime and mealtimes, greetings and goodbyes.
- **Weekly routines** for housework like washing, cleaning and shopping.
- **Yearly routines** involving holidays and family get-togethers.

How children benefit from routines

- Children feel safer and more secure when their home life is predictable.
- Routines can include fun, play or time with parents. Reading a story before bed, for example, can be a special time a child spends with a family member.
- Daily routines help set our body clocks – for example, bedtime routines help children’s bodies to ‘know’ when it’s time to sleep.
- Routines are a way of teaching your child ways to stay healthy, like time to brush teeth, wash hands after toileting and time to exercise.
- If your child needs to take medicine regularly, having a routine for this will make it more likely that you and your child will remember.

When routines are helpful

Maintaining normal daily routines as much as possible can make it easier for children to deal with the stress of events such as the birth of a new child, parents separating, or the illness or death of a family member. When major disruptions occur, like bushfires or floods, parents are often advised to get children back into their regular routines as soon as they can.
Parent Tip Sheet
Routines

How parents benefit from routines

- When things are busy and hectic, routines can help you feel more organised and more in control, which will make you feel less stressed.
- A routine will help you complete regular daily tasks efficiently.
- Routines take effort, but once established they will let you do things on ‘auto pilot’ so you can think about other things while you work.

Types of routines

**Routines for Daily Living:**
- Getting ready in the morning.
- Going to bed at night.
- Eating meals.
- Hygiene and health. For example, brushing teeth and washing hands.

**Routines for Household Responsibilities:**
- Tidying up.
- Caring for pets.
- Chores. For example, setting the dinner table and packing away.
- Shopping.

**Routines for Interacting and Fun:**
- Greetings and goodbyes.
- Eating meals together.
- Regular play and talk times with a parent each day.
- Special one-on-one time with a parent.
- Special weekly meals (such as pancakes on Sunday).
- Family days (family activity).
- Family DVD nights.
- Story time (book reading).
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Routines for Social, Cultural and Religious Activities

- Regular ‘play dates’.
- Regular contact with your extended family and friends.
- National/state/local celebration days, annual fetes and outings.
- Saying prayers.
- Observing religious events.

Think about whether a routine is right for you and your family

Try writing down what you do on a typical day.

- Which things do you do regularly with your family? Look at each of these and ask yourself whether life would be easier and more enjoyable if it ran more smoothly.
- Could children and other family members be involved more?
- Are there things you would like to do regularly but aren’t doing?

Starting a new routine can be a bit tricky, because it means changing the ways your family works now. Here are some things to think about:

- How will your new routine make life easier/better/less stressful?
- Can you build fun or play into daily tasks that you do with your children?
- Can you build some time to look after yourself? For example, have a rest, do something you enjoy - even for a few minutes.
- Can you make a new routine part of an old one? For example, you might get your child to take a new medicine just before he brushes his teeth?
- Can you make the routine without constantly having to remind everyone? For example, could you use the end of a television show to signal the beginning of a bedtime routine? Simple lists, or even post-it notes, can be good reminders.
How to set up a new routine

- Work out the **goal** of the routine. Picture the end result.
- List the **individual steps** in the order they need to be done.
- Make sure everyone is **clear about their role** in the routine.
- Work out the **timing** of the routine. How much time does each step take? What time will you need to get everything done?
- Think about ways of **setting up the routine for success**. Can you get rid of anything that will get in the way? For example, turning off the TV during the morning routine.
- Before you start, **talk everyone through steps** of the routine. Be prepared to do this more than once if needed.

If you are feeling like you can’t find time in the day to do the things you want with your children or for yourself, then a new routine might help.