



Routines and Routine Changes

Routines provide the structure many children need for moving through the day. This article includes strategies for developing routines as well as ideas for helping children cope with schedule changes.

1. Develop and Stick to a Routine – Caregivers set expectations and build stability by developing and utilizing consistent schedules. A consistent classroom and home routine is important for helping children transition to different activities throughout the day. Drastically varying wake up times or afternoon dismissal routines can cause tremendous stress for children who rely on consistency.

2. Use Visuals – Adults use day planners as schedule reminders. Children also need support to remember their schedule. Some children benefit from a picture or written schedule. Other children do well with a posted class schedule. At home, many children benefit from schedules indicating the sequence of activities in their morning or bedtime routines. Other tools for preparing children include a clock (for children who can tell time), kitchen timer, or wrist watch with a timer. These tools provide visual and auditory transition reminders with the time or a countdown and hearing a bell.

3. Prepare Children – Expected and unexpected routine changes are part of life. When a routine change is expected, prepare children with visuals and/or words. For example, if Simon usually goes to swimming lessons on Saturdays but the pool is closed, show him a visual, write the change down, or discuss the change well in advance. Additionally, tell him what he will be doing instead of swimming so he realizes there is another activity at this time. For unexpected changes such as a fire drill, practice in advance. Record the fire drill sound. Initially, let children know there will be a fire drill and tell them exactly what time it will happen. When this is successful, gradually practice with less specific notice. For example, let them know the fire drill will be during a certain hour or part of the day, instead of at a set point during the school day. If children benefit from visuals, hand them a word or picture card indicating it is a fire drill. Store this in an easy to access location and use it during practice sessions as well as unplanned school-wide drills. These same strategies can be applied for unexpected changes at home, such as picking up a child early from a canceled baseball practice.

4. Create an Organized Environment – Help children successfully follow their routines by creating organized environments. Well labeled homework folders, a basket to put shoes in after playing outside, a pencil box for classroom supplies, a hanger to hang and locate their coat consistently, and pictures or words to label where toys or art supplies belong are just a few ways to help children locate items to follow a routine.



Pictures



Organized Materials

5. Use Transition Objects - If children have a difficult time transitioning from one part of their routine to the next, use an object to represent the activity change. For example, if Sara is going to the library, give her a book to return so she has something that reminds her where she is going. This also gives her a task to complete (return the book) when she arrives. Some children like the security of having a familiar item from home when going to a new environment. A small toy or picture can be used to help children transition to unfamiliar locations.

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