

PARENTING NEWSLETTER

FOCUS: ROUTINES

In this weeks newsletter the focus is on establishing routines. We'll look at why routines are important for children and a family as a whole. This is fitting as during this lockdown period it is likely that some of our routines have slipped, and as the country anticipates a possible return to school for some children and work for some parents we wanted to provide some useful hints and tips on how to get back to a more regular routine. We'll look at bedtimes, mealtimes, and managing screen time.

We also include a section on praise with some useful information and exercises to try.

WHY ARE ROUTINES SO IMPORTANT?

Whether it is going to bed, waking up, eating, doing schoolwork or playing, predictable routines help children feel secure and learn good behaviours more quickly. This sense of security for children is especially important at a time where there is uncertainty and (for some) anxiety around returning to either school or work. Plan what your routine will be and discuss it with your family (you could do this activity together if you want, either way make sure everyone is aware of it. We have included a template at the end of the newsletter for you to complete and put somewhere in your home where everyone can see it.



BEDTIME

The importance of sleep is something everyone is well aware of and for children it is especially important as it impacts their mental and physical development. This section will look at avoiding resistance to going to bed and will also be useful for those bedtimes that may have gotten later during lockdown.

> Decide on a bedtime

This must then be told to children (This can be included on the family routine template).

> Establish a wind-down routine

About an hour before bedtime start a winding-down routine. This should be consistent and ritualistic, including relaxing events like warm bath, stories, listening to music, quiet play, and a snack. This has been shown to reduce resistance to going to bed. AVOID: rough play, scary or stimulating TV programmes and food and drink that contains too much sugar or caffeine.

> Give a warning

10/15 minutes before bedtime give your child a warning. "Go to bed" invites resistance. You could play beat the clock, where they race against a timer to get to their room and get into bed.

> Be firm and ignore protests

If they whine, call out, whine or cry when you leave the room ignore them unless they aren't feeling well.

> Check-in

If your children often call for you after you leave their room, you can make an agreement with them that if they don't call out you will check in on them in 10 mins, most children will rarely be awake by a second check but telling them you are coming back is reassuring and they won't keep themselves awake by calling out for you.

> Night lights and security objects

Try a special blanket or soft night light, this can give children a sense of security when going to sleep.

> Set up a reinforcement programme

Set up a sticker programme to encourage your children to go to bed and stay in their rooms without a fuss. Each morning they have been successful praise they can be praised and given a sticker.



MEALTIMES

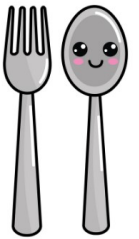
Mealtimes like bedtimes should be part of your family routine. They should be set at a certain time and stuck to as much as possible, they don't have to be really rigid but aim for a half an hour window like between 6:00pm-6:30pm. This can be recorded on the family routine template. Mealtimes can be problematic for some children, this section offers some tips to follow:

>Consider your child's hunger level

Some mealtime battles can be avoided by accepting that children don't have the same appetite as you. If they have had several nutritious snacks in the mid-morning and afternoon they may not want a large dinner at 6:00pm so allow them to eat until full.

>Eliminate constant snacking and junk food

On the other hand don't encourage constant snacking, limit this and they'll learn that the opportunity to eat is limited and they'll appreciate their dinner more. AVOID junk foods –these spoil mealtime appetites and can become addictive and decrease interest in more nutritious food like fruits and veggies.



>Time-Limit Meals

Instead of letting mealtimes drag on and giving them time to complain or play with food, determine a reasonable amount of time for them to finish eating (20-30 mins) Set a timer and when it goes off calmly remove their plate if they haven't eaten much you might say 'I guess you aren't hungry today'- the goal is to make them feel responsible for their own eating.

>Ignore Picky eating and bad table manners

Like a lot of bad behaviour ignoring it and encouraging positive behaviour is key. Try and ignore irritating eating habits-this means no coaxing or threatening and instead pay attention to good behaviour, they'll soon realise there is little payoff for misbehaving. Give praise verbally by picking up on something you like about the way they are eating or what they are eating.

> Make Eating a fun relaxed event

Ensure mealtimes are relaxed. Don't engage in power struggles. They should be associated with joy and quality time, make sure they aren't conducted in noisy, confused atmosphere with television or screen time.

"SCREEN TIME"

Many children are exposed to screen time of some kind each day, whether it is TV, using a tablet or smartphone, games console or computer.

During lockdown this may have risen as we all try to combat boredom.

There are many reasons why children's screen time needs to be limited, these are; violence present in TV/games can increase aggressive play and bad cognitive habits, discourages other learning activities such as schoolwork, interferes with conversation and discussion, discourages physical play, advertising teaches poor habits and demands for material possessions.



Getting the Most Out of “screen Time”

Many studies suggest that moderate use of age appropriate content has no significant effect on children's friendships and family relationships, and can even enhance certain visual intelligence skills. Screen time in moderation can be an important educational tool if you can take active control of it rather than allowing yourself or them to become addicted to it. Here are some ways to maximise positive and minimise negative effects:

> Set limits on extent of exposure

Limit the amount of screen time your child has access to. One hour a day is plenty especially for nursery age children. Be firm and consistent about your rule.

> Supervise and monitor what is watched

Carefully select the type of content watched/played. Teach your children which are allowed and which aren't. Content should be age-specific, there are controls which you can set on tablets/phones for YouTube for example.

> Encourage other physical and social activities and reading

Once screen time is over encourage physical play and reading, you can do this by engaging with them and doing the play based activity or reading with them.

> Set a bedtime that is not altered by screen time

Don't put TVs or allow screen time in bedrooms of younger children, this separates sleep time from being stimulated by watching things before bed. You also can control what they are watching if you can see them.

> Praise good viewing habits

Praise them when they are able to turn the TV or tablet/games console off when you ask them to.

> Set a good example

Be honest with yourself-you may be on your phone/tablet or watch TV more than you should. Your children will be aware of this and will follow suit-it will be much easier to implement rules if you follow them too.

PRAISE

Implementing routines can be tricky so we thought we would include this section on praise-as praising them for being good at bedtimes, mealtimes, and limiting screen time will help the routine change go more smoothly.

In general parents often overlook the importance of using praise and other social rewards such as positive attention, smiles and hugs, and play times with their children. They believe children should behave appropriately without adult intervention. In many cases, parents don't praise their children when they play quietly or do chores without a fuss. Research indicates, however, that a lack of praise and attention can lead to an increase in misbehaviour. In fact, praise and encouragement can be used to guide children through the many small steps it takes to master new skills, to help them develop a positive self-image, and to provide the motivation they need to do a difficult task. Unlike tangible rewards such as money or privileges, there can be an almost endless supply of praise! Here are some phrases to get you started:

'I like it when you..' 'You are tidying just like I asked you to—well done' 'What a good idea'

'You are listening to daddy so well' 'You did so well to stick to that' 'Mummy is very proud of you'

'Look at well he/she did at that' 'That is a perfect way of...' 'You are such a good friend to...'

'Good boy/Good girl' 'Thank you for..' 'That is very clever of you' 'You must feel proud of yourself for...'

Please check out the refrigerator notes about praising your child on the next page.

REFRIGERATOR NOTES ABOUT PRAISING YOUR CHILD



- Catch your child being good—
don't save praise for perfect behavior.
- Don't worry about spoiling your children with
praise.
- Increase praise for difficult children.
- Model self-praise.
- Give labeled and specific praise.
- Make praise contingent on behavior.
- Praise with smiles, eye contact, and enthusiasm.
- Give positive praise.
- Praise immediately.
- Give pats and hugs and kisses along with praise.
- Use praise consistently.
- Praise in front of other people.
- Praise and encourage the "process" of children's
learning, not just the finished product.
- Promote your child's recognition of change and
progress.
- Label child's feelings about personal
accomplishments.

OUR FAMILY ROUTINES

Write out your morning, after-school and
bedtime routine here

Morning:

After-school:

Bedtime: