

Children's Mental Health Week



Nurturing Healthy Minds: Routines

Did you know?

Maintaining a routine can have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing? The benefits of structure and routine include children learning new skills, improved self-regulation and compliance (including decreased aggression and non-compliant behaviours),¹ smoother transitions,² and improved ability to achieve goals.³ Bedtime routines for children that include healthy eating (a bedtime snack), hygiene (bathing/brushing their teeth), communication (reading or singing lullabies), and physical contact (cuddling/rocking) have been shown to promote healthy sleep, language development, literacy, emotion regulation, positive attachment relationships, family functioning, and act as a buffer against family stress.⁴

Further research suggests that there are four key factors in sustaining a daily routine:⁵

1. Adapting the routine to the resources available to the family (time, money, energy levels, ability)
2. Making the routine meaningful and relevant in regards to family goals and values
3. Balancing competing interests and family conflict
4. Ensuring that the routine provides stability and predictability



IT'S ALL ABOUT SELF- AND FAMILY-CARE

Okay, so we know routines can be helpful, but what should we include in our daily routine? The truth is, it depends on what is important to you and your family, and what you as a family want to prioritize. Remember that routines help us take care of ourselves and our family everyday – including in times of crisis or stress. Here are some ideas of what you could include in your personal and/or family routine:

- 1) Eating Healthy – Set a goal of eating one piece of fruit everyday with breakfast or making an effort to follow the Canada Food Guide's recommendations for healthy eating, <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>.⁷
- 2) Create a sleep schedule. Going to sleep and waking up at the same time everyday can improve concentration, energy levels, and mood.
- 3) Personal Hygiene.
- 4) Daily exercise. You can make exercise fun for kids by competing against each other, joining a sports team or striving to improve personal bests.
- 5) Spend quality time together. Find time to laugh, play, cuddle, create, read, bake, and love together. Learn about each other: Talk, ask questions, listen, validate and be kind.
- 6) Connect spiritually: Say a prayer, read a chapter of the bible, or attend a sermon.
- 7) Household chores.
- 8) Carve out 'me time.' Create a safe and quiet space where you can rest, reflect and recuperate. Slow down, take up a hobby, listen to the birds sing, smell the flowers, feel your heart beating, etc.
- 9) Set limits on screen time (cell phones, tv, computers, video games) and schedule times to disconnect.
- 10) Go outside - Spend some time in nature or soak up a little bit of vitamin D (don't forget sunscreen!).

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What if our Routine doesn't go as planned?

Breathe. It's okay!

Plans, routines, and schedules change all the time. You can't control your dog getting sick, the bus running late, or it raining during your planned trip to the playground. Support each other in accepting that these things happen sometimes. Ride the wave, and do the best that you can to adjust and cope.

Show *Compassion*. We're all going to make mistakes. Try to remember that even though your child didn't listen today, and your partner forgot their manners, we're human and we're doing the best that we can. Let's calm down and try to be understanding.

This includes *self-compassion*. It's normal and okay to not be able to be everything to everyone all of the time. Give yourself permission to take a break from being super- parent, partner, worker, athlete, etc. Rest when you need to. Be kind to yourself.

Tips for Implementing Routines

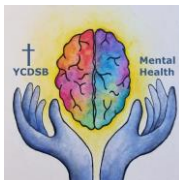
- ✓ Use visuals when creating routines for children.
- ✓ Keep it simple and add new tasks slowly. When goals are attainable, you are more likely to succeed and less likely to give up.³
- ✓ If it's not working, modify it. Identify obstacles and brainstorm solutions.
- ✓ Establish clear rules for certain tasks/activities. If children/youth understand what is expected of them, they are more likely to meet your expectations.
- ✓ Use rewards and/or encouragement to motivate children/ youth to commit to new routines. Gradually phase out rewards once the routine or behaviour has become a habit.
- ✓ Be patient. It can take up to 10 weeks to establish a new habit.³
- ✓ Find a convenient location to post your routine.
- ✓ Set alarms, timers or reminders to help you and your children stay on task.
- ✓ Lead by example.

Let's Support One Another

Consider calling a family meeting. Have each family member share what is important to them, and thus worth making time for. Sammy might suggest time with her friends is important. Jamie might want to spend more one-on-one time with mom. Alan might want to learn to play the guitar. Your partner might require some alone time after work, in order to have a breather before becoming fully engaged in family time.

Together, brainstorm ways to balance the needs of the family and each individual. Create a schedule or schedules to help you and your family stay on track with your goals. You can find sample schedules online to use as a guide or create your own.

This Mental Health Week Activity Package is brought to you by:



References

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