



ZERO to THREE  
Early connections last a lifetime



# Routines: The Power of Predictability

## What is a routine?

A **routine** is a group of activities that always happen in the same order. Daily routines happen the **same way and at the same time** each day. You might have a routine for getting ready in the morning, like showering and getting dressed.

When a baby or young child joins your family, things change! These changes can be hard to adjust to. Be kind to yourself as you figure out what works for your family.

**It helps to develop daily routines with your baby for bathing, feeding, and going to sleep.** They can be very simple. The routine for bath time might be undressing your baby and singing a song as you put them in the tub. After, you can apply lotion and wrap them in a towel. Then PJs! Some families use a chart with pictures to show a routine step by step. By the time your baby is six months old, they will probably recognize some routines.

## Why routines help your child

**Routines are comforting for both adults and babies.** They help everyone feel more relaxed. This is because routines make days and nights more predictable.

Routines are like a friendly map that **helps your child know what will happen next.** This feeling of knowing what to expect gives children a sense of safety. They learn to trust that caring adults will take care of their needs, whether it's feeding time or bedtime. This sense of safety helps them feel free to play, explore, and grow.

**Routines are also wonderful for learning! Relationships and repetition** help your baby's brain grow. Routines like grocery shopping or bath time are chances to talk, take turns, and have fun together.

## Routines make your life easier too

Routines help you **get through your daily to-do list with less stress and less work.** Knowing what is coming next is a huge help for you, too!

Routines also help your child when **it's time to switch from one activity to another** (like from playtime to lunch). A special song or game can make these times much easier for everyone.

Routines can also **bring your family closer.** They can reduce power struggles because your child can predict what should happen next. You might say, "I know you want a cracker. But it is clean-up time now. After clean-up, it is snack-time."



## Sometimes routines won't work – that's ok!

There will be days when your routine gets off track or falls apart. **That's life.** There will also be days when you choose not to follow your routines. These might include a holiday or a doctor's appointment. Talk to your baby or toddler about the new plan for the day. Then soothe them if they get upset. You might say, "You're going to the doctor today, so we can't go to the park. I know, that is a little sad for both of us."

## Tips to remember

- 1** Routines should make you feel calmer. If something's not working, it's ok to change things up.
- 2** Talk through the steps. **Say what is happening as you do it.** "Now we put on our pajamas." When you finish, tell your child: "We just finished our lullaby. Now it's time to say good night."
- 3** If you have a routine that is really tricky (like bedtime), **write down the steps** for that routine (or use pictures). Over time, your child will learn the routine. Hopefully, it will get easier.
- 4** Make your child a helper. Ask your child what is going to happen next and give them a "job" to do. Sharing the work makes them feel like an important part of the family.

**Remember, new routines do not "stick" right away. It takes practice** and a few tries to find what works best for your family. With time, routines will smooth the way for everyone.

### Have more questions?

Talk to your baby's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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