



## Routines in Times of Change

With the uncertainty that COVID-19 has introduced into our lives and the sudden necessity to keep children home from school, daily routines have been significantly disrupted.

For some children, a change in routine will feel like a loss. Behaviors may emerge that indicate the presence of grief and a strong desire for the familiar to return. Behaviors may include anxiety, clinginess, anger, aggression or self-blame. Essentially, what is underlying these behaviors is a sense of loss of control as well as an absence of a meaningful goodbye and for children, this is very significant. It is for these reasons that maintaining a degree of predictability, and establishing a new, temporary norm, is more important than ever.

### **Why are Routines Important?**

Routines help parents and children to maintain balance in their lives with familiar expectations. Routines allow us to feel better organized and give us a sense of control. They provide a level of structure, stability, and predictability that contribute to an overall feeling of safety and well-being.

### **Challenges in Establishing and Maintaining Routines**

Establishing new routines or maintaining familiar routines when so much else has changed can be challenging. Some of the common challenges are:

- Introducing too many new expectations too fast
- Not knowing where to begin
- Giving up all routines when things don't go according to plan
- Trying to make other families' routines fit your own
- Lacking energy or motivation

### **Special Considerations**

- Each family is special and unique, and so there is no "one size fits all" when it comes to routines.
- Consider your own unique family circumstances as well as family values. What is important to you and the members of your family?
- Some families respond best to highly structured, consistent routines, while some require more flexibility. There may even be differences between family members. Keep this in mind when thinking about what routines to establish in your home, and whether you might have different routines for different members of your family.

## **Where to Start?**

- Get input from family members. What routines do they think are important? When family members have a say, they are more likely to buy in to the process.
- Start small. For example, if introducing a “home reading” routine, start with the expectation of 15 minutes of reading and gradually increase the time rather than starting with the expectation of an hour and then giving up the routine when faced with resistance.
- Start with an “easy” routine. Introduce a routine that fits in well with what your family is already doing or is used to. For example, if your family went to hockey practice on Tuesdays and Thursdays, you could have “Floor Hockey” time in the basement on these days.
- Involve children in your daily tasks. Rather than worrying what children are up to when you are working on chores, include them (e.g., putting away laundry, unloading dishwasher, baking...).
- Include activities contributing to overall wellbeing. For example, include plans for movement and exercise, plans to go outdoors (if possible), and plans to get necessary rest and sleep.
- Use countdowns, time warnings and timers (consider egg timers, timers on phone) to let children know when one activity is coming to an end and another is about to begin.
- Consider whiteboards, post its, free printables, and photos taken on your phone to illustrate steps in routines.

*Be kind and understanding when things don't go according to plan.*

## **Don't Forget About Your Own Self-Care**

Your needs matter! Be sure to rest and take breaks – even if this means you schedule it in. Taking care of your own self-care might include maintaining social connections, engaging in enjoyable activities, and asking for help when you need it.

Most of all remember to BREATHE.  
Remind yourself that this has never happened before and there is no ONE right way.

## **Have Fun and Take Time to Reconnect**

Take advantage of being asked to stay home and practice social distancing.

Play games, complete puzzles, read books, listen and play music, dance, take family hikes, and work on an art project together. Establish family fun nights, such as movie nights, cooking nights, game nights and ice-cream nights. Even though being stuck at home may seem out of the norm, consider this time together as an opportunity for your family to make lasting memories.

## **Resources**

- <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/schools-closed-how-to-make-a-new-home-routine> (some parts are for U.S. viewers only)
- <https://www.cbc.ca/kidscbc2/watch/daniel-tigers-neighbourhood> (this links videos from the previous resource)