

TCES Occupational Therapy Department



Creating Routines

Why are routines important?

While school provides a form of routine, each day is also filled with uncertainties. A consistent routine in the home will have far fewer variables, so your kids can relax in knowing what to expect. That's why it is so important to develop and stick with a routine in challenging times.

Not only is routine hugely helpful in making your young person feel safe, it's also fundamental in the development of good habits. Some parts of your family routine will already be there – such as meal times and sleep times.

How to engage my young person in creating a routine

The key to making good habits stick is to do them regularly. So pick a new ritual, and keep with it. Make it simple, make it fun, and don't expect your young person to add too many new activities to their routine at once. Try to keep ritual and routine in place wherever and whenever you can, to make the constantly changing nature of growing up as safe, predictable and easy for your young person as possible.

10 Practical Ways to support your young person to create a routine

1. Begin the conversation on their cue. For instance, if your young person expresses that they are tired or stressed about being late to school or shares another detail that relates to their daily routine, take the opportunity to LISTEN. When possible, allow your young person to initiate this conversation, rather than bringing it up out of context.

2. Connect with your young person's experience. Share that you, too, are working to build routines that are helpful and that this is a process in progress. Consider discussing how transitions and certain parts of the day can be challenging for you. Share pros/cons, successes/challenges.

3. Start small. Allow this to be a process with many parts. Remember (and remind your young person) that small changes can have a big impact. For example, you may invite your young person to start reflecting on with morning routines because this is when they feel most rushed and grumpy. Save the conversation about after-school work routines for another day.

4. Ask (a few) open-ended questions. Consider supporting your young person's critical thinking process by asking, "What steps do you need to take each morning to be ready for school?" or "What parts of the morning seem to set you up for success?" Additionally, you may briefly share your own process and reflection as it is relevant.

5. Invite your young person to document their plan. As they work on their list of steps or routines, you can work on yours, too. Let your young person decide where they will keep the list. Be sure to support your young person in including rest, play, or relaxation in their routines (and you too)!

6. Explore the order the steps need to be in. Ask your young person questions such as, “What needs to come first?” “Which steps are priorities?” and “What tasks seem most helpful in your routines?”

7. Discuss time management. This can include discussion about details such specific times for tasks like waking up, eating dinner, or going to bed. Additionally, help your young person consider how long they need for after-school work breaks, social media scrolling, self-care, or chore routines, for example.

8. Offer support. Specifically, ask your young person how much support they need and want from you and what that support might look like. It might be verbal reminders at first, collaborating on certain tasks, or giving more autonomy.

9. Monitor progress together. Set yourself and your young person up for success by acknowledging that routines take experimenting and trials to determine the best fit. After a few days, check in using questions like, “What’s working in your morning routine?” or “What’s not working?” and “How does this routine seem to be helping you?” or “How do you feel when you complete your routines?”

10. Return to this conversation regularly. It’s always okay to share observations when you see that routines have become inconsistent. Share your observation in a neutral and curious way. “I’m noticing that you are rushing out the door with your breakfast in hand. Is there something in the routine that might need to shift?” Be sure to celebrate what’s working as well.