

# Evidence-Based Reasons Why Routines Are Important



**1 A good routine is flexible for the needs of all family members.** Routines help family members know who should do what, when, in what order, and how often. While all routines will not include the entire family, many can provide a contributing role for family members, including young children. Providers should remember that every family has their own unique routines, times, and ways to do them. Routines should promote family participation and not focus solely on the young child. Siblings are often helpful and motivating participants. Routines are how families organize to get things done to be successful, spend time together, and have fun. They give families more time to be together.

**2 Routines have built-in repetition that supports practice, promotes learning, and develops independence.** Some routines happen daily, such as car travel to and from child care, or several times a day, such as meals and clean up. Other routines, such as trips to the park or family pizza night, occur weekly or less but still serve an important family participation function. Practicing throughout the day in varying routines promotes the most efficient learning.

**3 The younger the child, the more time spent in routines – it’s what they do.** Infants spend most of their awake time participating in some type of facilitated routine (e.g., eating, playing, changing) with an interested and familiar adult- a perfect partner for learning. This means there are many opportunities for building relationships, exploring new opportunities, and embedding intervention to support growth for specific skills. The time and opportunities are there and waiting! As the child grows and develops, less time is spent in adult-facilitated routines and activities. Still, many opportunities continue to exist throughout the preschool years.

**4 Routines help build your baby’s brain.** So much of the recent brain development research emphasizes the importance of face-to-face interactions, eye gaze, cuddling, and talking or singing to the child by the caregiver. Building routines that include a “dose” of human comfort and touch helps the child develop neural connections that serve as the foundation for future learning and can support the development of resilience.



**5 Routines can let children know how important they are to their caregivers and family.** Routines can help strengthen the family's shared beliefs and values and can help build a sense of purpose and togetherness for the family. Face-to-face exchanges during peek-a-boo, giggles and cuddles in tickle games, or soothing songs while rocking together before bedtime are examples of routines that promote positive social-emotional development and a sense of security and safety. A predictable home environment with familiar routines helps children feel safe and secure, especially when things are stressful or when children are going through difficult stages or experiences.

**6 There are no hard and fast rules about routines.** How many or what kind of routines children and families should have or which ones should be used for embedded intervention vary depending on the family and circumstance. Routines should be based on individual child and family interests and priorities and matched to the child's learning targets and developmental outcomes. However, research has shown that for frequency of opportunities, routines should be varied and dispersed across the day when practice on the learning targets is functional and meaningful to increase engagement and participation.

**7 Routines can be good for caregivers too.** Including the child in everyday routines can free up time for other things. Daily routines help families get the essentials done. Having a system and sequence that works can help the caregiver feel more organized and less over-extended. Family life is often smoother with a few routines for everyone. Building routines with families can be an important strategy for providers because the structure of a routine may increase the caregiver's organization and management (executive functioning) skills and lead to an increased sense of competence and confidence.

**8 Routines are different than schedules.** The predictable framework promotes security and confidence for systematic teaching within the natural flow of the family's preferred activities. The predictability guides a caregiver to support the child's participation, whether the routine is making the bed, walking the dog, taking a bath, or building with blocks.

**9 Routines can also help families have fun!** Not all routines need to be chores. You can help the family identify and organize fun activities like game nights, visiting Grandma and Grandpa, park adventures, or reading books together. Activities like these are suitable for relaxed family interaction and togetherness.

**10 Routines help providers coach on how to embed intervention.** Routines provide a familiar context. After observing the caregiver and child in a routine, the provider can build on the caregiver's strengths interacting with the child, problem solve with them on how to increase opportunities or add learning targets to a routine, and then reflect with the caregiver on its effectiveness. The familiarity of the routine provides a platform so the coaching can focus specifically on the strategies and targets the caregiver and child want to learn.



## References

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