



Booklet 4: Routines

Headlines:

- Routines are structured common tasks or duties done regularly.
- Routines are important to give children a sense of predictability and control in their lives.
- Typical examples include having regular mealtimes, sleeping patterns, and controlled screen time.

A routine refers to common tasks or duties done regularly. Routines can be set to take place according to an individual's personal needs (e.g. daily, weekly, monthly). The aim behind having such structures when going through life is to keep people productive, organised, and to allow a sense of predictability in what can otherwise be a chaotic life.

Importance of routine for children

Routines are not only important for adults but for children as well. There are various reasons why having children adopt routines supports their healthy development. Firstly, it helps provide a sense of predictability through regular structures in their daily lives, helping them feel safe and secure. The familiar patterns can calm children and allow them to develop a sense of control in their lives (Sytsma et al., 2001; Spagnola & Fiese, 2007). Having regular routines in the household improves overall family life satisfaction as well as promoting a stable and close family unit (Jensen et al., 1983). It has been shown that routines help preschoolers develop good emotional regulation skills and improved cognitive ability (Ferretti & Bub, 2014).

Similar improvements have been found in kindergarten (Ferretti & Bub, 2017) and in primary school aged children (Ren et al., 2019). This highlights the benefits of regular routines on social, emotional, and cognitive development, making them important tools when parenting children.

Types and method of good routine

1. Eating regularly and eating as family/together

Eating habits in children and teenagers have been scrutinised due to the prevalence of childhood obesity and eating disorders, globally (Ng et al., 2014). Reviews show unhealthy eating has been associated with a lack of regular eating and meal patterns (e.g. skipping breakfast; de Oliveira Figueiredo et al., 2019), highlighting the importance of developing more regular routine mealtimes.

A healthy diet for children involves a well-balanced diet of proteins, fruits, vegetables, and grains. Encouraging children to eat a balanced diet also requires parents to set a good example (Hesketh et al., 2005). However, having a well-balanced diet also involves reducing the number of meals a child might skip. Frequent family mealtimes not only help create regular eating patterns but also support a time for children to interact and communicate with their siblings and parents (Fiese et al., 2006).

In a review of research detailing the effects of family meal frequency on the psychological and social outcomes for children and young people, Harrison et al. (2015) found evidence to suggest that frequent family meals reduce the risk of disordered eating, substance use, violence, and feelings of depression in children. They also found improvements in young people's self-esteem and motivation to learn, further highlighting the importance of frequent family mealtimes. The research review also suggested some gender differences, with females being more positively affected by frequent family meals compared with males.

2. Regular sleeping patterns

There is a growing set of evidence showing the importance of sleep on health and wellbeing for all individuals, and children are no exception (Davis et al., 2004). A recent review by Dutil et al. (2018) showed that sleep may be critical for the brain development of individuals aged 1 to 17 years old. Poor sleep was linked with altered brain functions and development. Although it is difficult to confirm these conclusions due to the small sample sizes used and the limitations of the measures of brain function (i.e. EEG, FMRI), multiple other studies have indicated that a lack of sleep is linked to increased risk of poor cognitive, behavioural and emotional outcomes in children (e.g. Cheng et al., 2021; Conklin et al., 2018; Reynaud et al., 2018). To demonstrate recent evidence for the importance of bedtime routines, Kitsaras et al. (2018) investigated the relationship between bedtime routines and factors associated with the wellbeing of children. They found evidence to suggest that children with good sleep routines showed better performance in their working memory, attention, and cognitive flexibility, compared to children that weren't given bedtime routines. Similar positive results were found when measuring the children's readiness for school, again demonstrating the importance of sleep routines for children.



3. Controlling screen time

Screen time refers to an individual's use of phones, electronic tablets, and other devices.

Many state the need to reduce screen time due to its negative impact on sleep (Hale, & Guan, 2015), self-esteem (Braig et al., 2018), and mental and physical health (Boers et al., 2019; Hrafnkelsdottir et al., 2018). However, it is also considered a source of short-term coping for children working through difficult situations, particularly highlighted through such times as the Covid-19 lockdowns. Time on a screen enables children to interact with their peers during periods of isolation and allows them to keep busy (Korhonen, 2021). This is not to encourage the continuous and excessive use of these devices but rather to promote their controlled, structured use.



Useful links

- https://youtu.be/KUWn_TJTrnU
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnH4ljen7OI>

Booklet 4: Rewards

Headlines:

- Rewards may help positive behaviours to become daily habits.
- Rewards need to be planned and controlled to avoid negative consequences such as a reduction in what is termed 'intrinsic' motivation, which is a core inner motivation.
- An example of a reward system method is the use of sticker charts.

Rewards are things given to someone in recognition of their effort or achievement. It is important to consider the difference between a reward and a bribe as they can both be used as motivation for a child to do something. Bribes are offered unplanned and used in desperation during bad behaviour, whilst rewards are earned for good behaviour and are thoughtfully controlled by the parent.

Importance of reward

Rewards can help positive behaviours to become daily habits. To best understand rewards, it is useful to first consider the principles of reinforcement learning (RL), also referred to as conditioning (Thorndike, & Bruce, 2017). Its process involves the building of associations between a stimulus or action (e.g. getting good grades) and a reinforcer (e.g. reward). There are two different types of reinforcement learning: positive and negative. Positive reinforcement refers to adding something into the situation (e.g. giving a child some sweets), whilst negative reinforcement involves taking something away (e.g. taking a favourite toy away) to increase the likelihood of children behaving a particular way.

Rewards are associated with positive reinforcement. They help children to make an association between the desirable behaviour they have just displayed and a positive benefit that they receive as a result. The association the child makes between these two things increases the chance that they will repeat the same desirable behaviour. For example, if a child repeatedly receives lots of positive attention when they tidy away their toys, they become more likely to do this in the future.

A method of using rewards effectively for children

Developing an effective reward system helps successfully lead to healthy behavioural changes in children. Important steps to take when developing an effective reward system are to: 1) make clear what the desired behaviour is, 2) identify an achievable reward, and 3) be consistent (Przeworski, 2014). One method used for preschoolers and young children is to use sticker charts. With this method, children receive stickers in exchange for desired behaviours. Sticker charts have been shown to lead to, for example, improved discipline in engaging with medical treatment (Luersen et al., 2012), improved classroom behaviour (Hurley, 2016), and even better sleeping patterns (Hiscock & Davey, 2018). Sticker charts should be used thoughtfully as they can also lead to poor bargaining attitude and an increase of what are termed "extrinsically" motivated behaviours, which are behaviours that are driven by an external reward.

Children also have different interests, making sticker charts a less effective reward for some, e.g. older youths, where you might consider more relevant rewards that better align with their interests.

Useful links

- <https://10.1080/10400419.2003.9651404>
- <https://www.safeandcivilschools.com/research/references/positive-approach-to-behavior.php>
- <https://www.verywellfamily.com/positive-reinforcement-child-behavior-1094889>
- <https://anitaclear.co.uk/difference-between-rewards-and-bribes/>

References for whole of Session 4

All references used in this booklet can be found in the separate 'References Booklet'.

Selected references:

- Akin-Little, K. A., Eckert, T. L., Lovett, B. J., & Little, S. G. (2004). Extrinsic reinforcement in the classroom: Bribery or best practice. *School Psychology Review*, 33(3), 344-362.
- Ferretti, L. K., & Bub, K. L. (2014). The influence of family routines on the resilience of low-income preschoolers. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 35(3), 168-180.
- Kitsaras, G., Goodwin, M., Allan, J. et al. Bedtime routines child wellbeing & development. *BMC Public Health* 18, 386 (2018).