

# Ask a Specialist: Benefits of Family Routines

**Kathleen Riggs**

**08/19/2015**

Children may not exactly beg parents to establish routines for school-day mornings, family meals or weekend chores, but every family needs a certain amount of structure to function well. Morning routines at home can help family members feel prepared for the day and reduce the stress they might otherwise feel if they were to rush out the front door in the morning with barely enough time to shower, get dressed and grab their backpack.

Infants, teenagers and even adults all do best when certain routines are established and we know ahead of time what is expected of us, when we need to participate and how much time it will take. In other words, routines should be regular, predictable and consistent.

Not all time needs to be closely planned, but families and individuals can benefit from morning, after-school, evening and bedtime routines. Even weekends go more smoothly with planning.

## Weekday morning routine

The [Healthy Children website](#), established by the American Academy of Pediatrics, suggests that in order to make the household function well in the morning, family members should know what needs to be done in advance. The organization suggests the following:

- Put as many things in order as possible the night before.
- Keep wake-up routines cheerful and positive.
- Be sure your child eats breakfast, even if he or she is not hungry in the morning. It's important to have food in the system to start the day. That goes for grownups too.
- Pause long enough to say goodbye to your child. A hug goes a long way to make your child's day go better.

## After school routine

When parents can't be home to welcome children when school is out, it's important to choose a place they can be where they are safe and cared for until mom, dad

or another guardian can be with them. The majority of risk-taking, participation in pranks or juvenile delinquent behaviors from children and youth commonly take place after school when children are unsupervised.

Whether the after-school routine includes staying to participate in activities at the school, going to a grandparent's home, or elsewhere, children who know they have a safe and caring place to go after school will remain more focused throughout the day. Parents should make every effort to see that a caring adult or responsible teen is available. Even having a close neighbor who is at home and available if needed can help children feel secure.



## Mealtime routine

Families should eat several meals together every week to provide all members time to be together. Sitting down to a family meal can be a time to hear about everyone's day and reinforce that family members care. This time can be positive by allowing family members to briefly tell about their favorite part of the day. It may also serve as a time to discuss family plans or how to best support a family member in an upcoming activity.

## Bedtime routine

Children, teens and adults all benefit from having an established routine when they can wind down before crawling into bed. Younger children will benefit the most emotionally and physically from repetition each night. If parents will allow 30-45 minutes of preparation, the children will be calmer and able to fall asleep more easily. Bedtime should include story time and/or a chance for children and youth to talk about their day with mom or dad. Try to avoid rowdy activities just before bedtime. As they get older, children will be able to establish their own routine. However, parents should still have older youth stick to an established time to be in bed.

It can be a challenge for families to establish comfortable, effective routines. It requires planning, creating a structure

that is realistic and getting all family members to commit to the plan. However, such efforts will pay great dividends in cutting down on disorder and confusion. It may also strengthen the family unit overall and increase children's devotion to their family.

By: Kathleen Riggs, Utah State University Extension family and consumer sciences professor, Iron County, [kathleen.riggs@usu.edu](mailto:kathleen.riggs@usu.edu), 435-586-8132

Direct column topics to Julene Reese, USU Extension writer, [julene.reese@usu.edu](mailto:julene.reese@usu.edu). What Next? Get useful tips like this as soon as we release them. Sign up here.