

# Time and Predictable Schedules

## What is the concern?

Children don't worry about being on time, rarely look at the clock, and frequently feel rushed, mainly because they don't develop a good sense of time until they're about age 10. Some children may really struggle with time and with making transitions from one activity to the next without predictable schedules.

Adults may easily understand the meaning of "a couple of minutes," "a few days," or "next weekend," but the concept of time is often difficult for many children. When children don't know about time or don't have a good understanding of what's coming next, a missed meal, a missed nap, or abrupt changes in activities can lead to irritability, tantrums, or other problem behaviors.

## How can I use predictable schedules to prevent my child's problem behaviors?

Routines and schedules help children to feel safe and to learn how to organize their time as they grow up. Help organize children's activities with sensible routines, including:

- **Waking up** – Try to maintain the same wake up time, or close to it, each day. We all like to sleep in on weekends, but young children usually wake up early. Someone needs to get up with your child, prepare breakfast, and set her up to play quietly on weekends to keep her schedule consistent. Throughout the week, make sure your child gets up at the same time, even if the schedule is a little different.
- **Meals** – Have meals on a schedule. Eat with your child at a scheduled mealtime at about the same time each day. This reduces behavior problems overall, improves what your child eats, and promotes healthy weight as she grows older.
- **Routine care** – Have your child get dressed, take a bath, and do other routine care on schedule. On weekends, once up and fed, your child should get dressed at the same time as she does during the week. If your child takes a bath or shower every night, also try to do that around the usual weekday time. This will help to avoid arguments and stalling around these activities.
- **Bedtime** – Keep bedtime routines consistent. Have your child get ready for bed at the same time every night. Make sure that baths, brushing teeth, getting a drink, reading, using the toilet, and lights out or quiet time are at around the same time. Do these tasks in the same order every night to help your child learn the routine and fall asleep more easily. Once your child is in bed, keep the house quiet for the next half hour.
- **Using a calendar** – Children understand and remember pictures better than spoken words. Get a calendar on which you can draw or put pictures of events for the coming week. Include things that don't happen every day, such as sports practices, birthday parties, and school events. Each week go over the events that will happen that week. If your child asks a lot of questions about when something will happen, show your child the calendar, and let her count the days. Use the calendar to answer "when" questions. This will help your child plan and also organize time as she gets older.



## Tips to Remember:

- Times for wake up, meals, baths, and bedtime should all be on schedule.
- Try to stick to the same schedule on weekends.
- Use a picture calendar to organize events; your child will remember it better.
- If you stick to a routine, you'll have fewer arguments over meals, bedtimes, and routines.
- If these suggestions do not work, please talk with your pediatrician for more ideas.

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