

A Day with the Family, Presents: “‘Same O,’ Same O’”

By: Elizabeth Brunscheen-Cartagena, Family Educator, K-State Research & Extension

“Same old, same old” suggests monotony, but routines are powerful tools for conserving energy and creating time for what really matters. A routine is a series of actions performed in the same order on a regular basis; the sooner we establish them, the more balanced our lives will be. Over time, these routines become habits and can almost be done with our eyes closed—which is a good thing if you are not a morning person! Routines provide stability and comfort, helping us cope with unexpected changes.

Children, like adults, feel more secure when their daily activities are predictable. A consistent schedule and routines provide them with a sense of control over their environment. Consistent routines also help the school year go more smoothly.

To create effective routines this school year, throughout the day, consider:

- **In the morning:** Start with a simple, comforting routine, such as a nutritious breakfast followed by tasks like brushing teeth, getting dressed, and packing lunch. Visual aids or reminders can be very helpful.
- **After school:** Establish a relaxing routine for your child that includes putting away belongings, having a snack, playing, and doing chores like taking out the trash, feeding the pet, putting dirty clothes in the hamper, etc. Consistency is key, even on busy days.
- **Homework:** Create a comfortable study space with all the necessary materials to do homework time productive and stress-free.
- **Dinner:** Family dinners foster academic success, self-esteem, and reduce risky behaviors. Involve your child in meal preparation and/or cleanup to build life skills and strengthen bonds.
- **Bedtime:** Establish a relaxing bedtime routine, such as a bath, brushing teeth, reading, and turning off the lights. Limit screen-time to an hour before bedtime.

A consistent routine at home is essential for several reasons:

- **Mental Health:** Routines reduce mental load by simplifying daily decisions, thus freeing up space in the brain for other tasks. Routines are already a habit that is done automatically. This decreases stress and anxiety and promotes a sense of order and purpose.
- **Confidence:** Consistent routines help develop reliable habits. Both adults and children who maintain those routines consistently are usually more secure and predictable in their behavior. They can be trusted!
- **Physical Health:** They support physical health through regular habits such as good nutrition, exercise, hygiene, and adequate sleep.
- **Decision Making:** Routines offer a sense of control, making decision making easier. By knowing what is in front of you, you can see options easily.
- **Predictability:** Having clarity about what will happen each day creates a sense of comfort and security. This also helps mentally prepare for less pleasant situations, such as having someone else pick me up from school as a child, or having to go to the doctor for a procedure as an adult.

- **Coping with Challenges:** Routines help us better cope with unexpected challenges. Instead of giving up when things do not go as planned, we can adapt and make the most of the day. Change is inevitable, but routines provide a stable foundation.

By incorporating routines, both children and adults experience stability, confidence, and overall well-being.