

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

In Praise of Routine

“The key is not in spending time, but in investing it.”

~ Stephen R. Covey

“GOOD MORNING, LOUIS, GOOD MORNING, RUBY, good morning, Sasha. We’re glad you’re here today.” One of our three-year-olds wants his mother to remember where each of his classmates sits at Circle when they sing the “Good Morning” song at home. His mother laughs about his getting upset when she leaves someone out. In pre-school, this daily singing routine gives him a sense of security—he knows what to expect at 9:15 every morning and has learned to sing along with confidence. Repeating the song at home (and knowing the names better than his mom) bolsters his sense of mastery about going to school.

At The Meher Schools, we’ve always found that routine benefits children and teachers in countless ways. Research continually reveals that the value of routine goes beyond our common assumptions. Structure make parents and children feel more competent and has the potential of bringing them more into harmony with each other.

Children who have consistent routines at home tend to have more self-confidence, to pay more attention to rules, and to act more compliantly. Parents who have established routines are less likely to have power struggles with their children. For example, they don’t have to battle out when to do homework because the structure is already established.

Following routines is easier said than done, and the kinds of structure families provide varies by temperament and cultural background. No need to feel guilty if structure doesn’t come naturally. However, it’s nice to know that routines and rituals can make life less stressful.

Organizing mornings. Mornings are less stressful when children know activities occur in a particular order—making the bed, eating breakfast, getting dressed, collecting items for school. Last-minute searches for backpacks or homework that causes everyone to run late can create distress that lasts throughout the day. Many parents swear that getting up fifteen minutes earlier to have alone time leaves them more refreshed all day.

Eating together. Family meals buffer stress. Children have a chance to talk about the day’s events. However, did you know that eating together also relates to building children’s vocabulary? Conversations about various topics introduce new words.

Keeping bedtime routines. Research shows that consistent bedtime routines help children to fall asleep more quickly and to wake up less at night. Dr. Jodi Mindell taught parents of infants and toddlers at Children’s Hospital in Philadelphia a simple process: bath, massage (applying lotion to toddlers), cuddling and singing, then lights out within 30 minutes of bath. Children’s sleep improved, as did parental mood.

Scheduling chores. Preschoolers can learn to set the table, make their beds, and even do their laundry. These activities promote self-sufficiency and confidence. Having routines for doing chores doesn’t mean that family members can’t trade jobs. One mother wrote jobs on playing cards and dealt them out to her children on Saturday mornings. The important idea is to establish the consistent expectation that everyone helps.

Of course, life isn't all about routine. However, structure makes the spontaneous even more fun. Two of our moms took their daughter to Briones to witness a star shower in the middle of the night. However, we all appreciate the regularity of life when we come back from an outing or vacation and step back into that cushion of routine that keeps us from having to constantly decide what comes next.

March 14, 2012

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