

## Routines Age 2 Summary

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### Why Routines?

As a parent or someone in a parenting role, you play an essential role in your child's success. There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-child relationship, and daily routines provide a perfect opportunity.

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#### Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Consider your routines throughout the day—morning, midday, and bedtime. Creating routines around wake-up time, mealtime, naptime, bedtime, trips back and forth to child care, checking the mailbox, and going to the grocery store can make these times predictable, comforting, and fun for your child. Involve your child in creating routines around these common times by asking questions.
  - If your nighttime routine includes bathing your child, brushing their teeth, reading a bedtime story, and singing a lullaby every night before bed, you could ask your child: “Would you like to brush your teeth before or after your bath?” “What song would you like me to sing before you fall asleep?”
- Each time there is an opportunity, ask your child, “How do you feel? How do you think I feel?” Two-year-olds do not yet have a feelings vocabulary and cannot describe their body sensations when upset or dealing with big feelings. Changes in their routines are a great place to explore feelings, but they will need your support to be successful.
  - For example, notice and name the feeling if your child makes a disagreeable facial expression. “I noticed that when I told you we would do something different today, your eyebrows squished down, and your face was red. Were you feeling mad?”
- Practicing naming feelings will enable your child to identify their feelings and others and seek support when needed. This can help reduce the length and strength of tantrums as your child gains emotional competence.
- When reading books, point out routines that seem comforting and moments when those routines change. Talk about what you notice: “I noticed the duck in this story likes to go with her mom to get the mail daily,” or “The duck seems scared to try something different.”

**Tip:** Your child will give you many cues about whether the routines you develop feel too complicated or too simple and if they are followed consistently enough for your child to feel secure. Every child is different, and your child may change daily depending on how willing they are to follow a routine or how much help they need to manage planned and unplanned routine changes.

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## Teach New Skills

- Narrate your daily routines. As you prepare lunch at home or go shopping together at the store, talk about what you are doing each step of the way. Involve your child by asking questions. For example, “I am getting lunch ready. I think we’ll have milk with our lunch. Does that sound yummy to you?”
- Make your thinking and feelings explicit. Talk about what you notice, how you are feeling, and why you are feeling it. “I love that we always start our morning with a big hug and then eat eggs for breakfast together. It is my favorite time of the day. It feels so good that I always know that when I wake up, we will do our good morning routine together. Do you remember when we ran out of eggs and had to eat cereal for breakfast? I like our usual egg breakfasts, but it was fun to try something different.”
- Talk aloud about how you respond to your big feelings: “I was a little scared when our plans changed, but everything worked out, and I feel so much better now.”
- Grow confidence. In addition to having consistent daily routines with your child, point out when they are following the routine independently and when they can manage changes: “I noticed that you knew we needed to wash our hands before eating lunch.” When something is different, you might say, “I noticed you knew your favorite blanket was in the wash, and you just picked up a different one to cuddle with. You knew how to handle that change.”
- If your child is worried about a change, for example, and uses definitive language like “No,” you may respond with:
  - “This is something different, and I know we can do it.”
  - “Do you remember last time we didn’t have your favorite pajamas, and you had to wear something different to bed? You took a deep breath and were able to do it.”
  - “I wonder if we can do something that will help us feel better?”

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## Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Learn about your child’s development. Each new age presents challenges, and being informed about your child’s developmental milestones promotes empathy and patience.

- Engage in routines together, like picking up toys before snacktime or hanging up your coats when you come inside. Allow your child to engage with you in routines.
- Be sure to consider how you can create the conditions to support their success, such as having them practice routines alongside you. “I like to put my coat on a hanger in the closet. Would you like to put your coat right beside mine?”
- Initially, practice may require more teaching, but avoid taking over and doing it for your child.
- Once your routines feel comfortable and consistent, allow your child to change them. “I’ve noticed that we enjoy reading bedtime stories together and have enough time to read more than one book. Do you think we should start reading two books before bed?” The goal is to feel secure from being able to predict what happens each day and feel comfortable with change.
- Use your child’s dolls or stuffed animals to act out your routine, especially if it is new or changing. This is an excellent way to practice mastering the steps of the routine. If you know a change is coming up; you can act out that change with dolls and stuffed animals so your child can experience what that change will feel like.

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## Support Your Child’s Development and Success

- Use “Show me...” statements with a positive tone and body language to express excitement and curiosity, and ask them to demonstrate how they can work through a routine with you. “Let’s put on our pajamas to get ready for bed. Can you show me which pajamas you want to wear?” Offer support so your child can be successful.
- Don’t move on quickly if your child shows interest in trying something new. Children often need more time to stick with a challenge or pursue a goal. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to show you they are competent. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they can gain skills over time.
- Recognize effort using “I notice...” statements like: “I noticed how you picked a book for us to read as part of our bedtime routine.”
- On days with extra challenges, routines can feel incredibly comforting. When the house is full of visitors, and there are many changes in your regular routine, still follow your morning routines, like singing your good morning song or taking a walk around the neighborhood using the same path you usually use. This will help your child feel confident even with new people, and they will feel less stressed because they know what to expect.
- Actively reflect on how your child feels when they have mastered a routine or are facing a change. You can offer reflections like:
  - “I see you have grabbed the book you want to read before bed. You know exactly what to expect next.” Naming their success will help to grow confidence.
  - “A new person is reading the book at storytime today. You can sit with me until you feel comfortable if you want to.” Noticing your child’s concerns and developing strategies for facing them will help your child know that you are there to help them get through this change of plans

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## Recognize Efforts

- Recognize and call out when things are going well. It may seem obvious, but it's easy not to notice when everything moves smoothly. Noticing and naming the behavior provides the necessary reinforcement that you see and value your child's choice.
- Recognize small steps along the way. Don't wait for significant accomplishments—like the full bedtime routine going smoothly—to recognize effort. Remember that your recognition can work as a tool to promote more positive behaviors. Find small ways your child is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, snuggle and read before bed after getting through your bedtime routine.

**Trap:** It can be easy to resort to bribes when recognition and occasional rewards are underutilized. If parents or those in a parenting role frequently resort to bribes, it is likely time to revisit the five-step process.

**Trap:** Think about what behavior a bribe may unintentionally reinforce. For example, offering a sucker if a child stops a tantrum in the grocery store checkout line may teach the child that future tantrums lead to additional treats.

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