

Building Family Routines That Reduce Stress and Conflict

Family life can feel rushed when no one knows what comes next. A simple routine gives children clear steps. It can also help parents repeat fewer directions during busy parts of the day.

Start with one hard time. It may be morning, homework, dinner, or bedtime. Choose three or four steps that can happen in the same order most days.

Keep each step short and clear. For example: put away your backpack, wash your hands, eat a snack, and begin homework. A picture list can help young children remember the steps with fewer reminders.

Tell your child about changes before they happen. Try, “Tonight we have an appointment, so dinner will be later.” A short warning helps children adjust and lowers surprise.

Routines should guide the family, not control every minute. Start small, keep the plan flexible, and build from there each week.

Give your child one small choice inside the routine. Your child might pick a shirt or choose a bedtime book. Praise effort when the steps are followed. If the plan stops working, change one part and try again. Calm, steady practice matters more than a perfect schedule.

Did You Know?

- ✓ The American Academy of Pediatrics says children do best when family routines are regular, predictable, and consistent.¹
- ✓ The CDC explains that routines help children feel safe and know what to expect, while helping family life go more smoothly.²
- ✓ Harvard’s Ready4Routines project uses bedtime and mealtime routines to strengthen executive function, the skills used for planning and self-control, in adults and children.³

Research Sources

1. American Academy of Pediatrics. [“The Importance of Family Routines.”](#) HealthyChildren.org. Updated June 28, 2024.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [“Tips for Relying on Routines and Rules.”](#) Essentials for Parenting Toddlers and Preschoolers. April 30, 2026.
3. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. [“Ready4Routines: Building the Skills for Mindful Parenting.”](#) January 20, 2016.

Family Routine Builder

Use this page to build one simple family routine. Start small, keep the steps clear, and change one part at a time.

Child's name: _____	Date: _____
Routine: _____	Time of day: _____

1. Choose One Hard Time

Choose one difficult part of the day: morning, homework, dinner, bedtime, or another busy time. My routine:

2. List the Routine Steps

Write three or four short steps in the same order your child can follow most days.

Step 1: _____ Step 2: _____

Step 3: _____ Step 4: _____

3. Add One Small Choice

Offer one choice that does not change the routine.

My child may choose: _____

Or: _____

4. Prepare for Changes

Tell your child before the routine changes. Explain what will be different and what will stay the same.

What I will say: _____

5. Practice, Praise, and Adjust

Praise effort when the steps are followed. If the plan stops working, change one part and try again.

What worked: _____

One part to change: _____