



## Child Care Management / Schedules and Routines

### The Importance of Schedules and Routines



Dear Debi,

When looking for a preschool for my 2-year-old, I noticed there was no set schedule. Do you think young children should adhere to some type of schedule?

– **Mary**, Torrance, CA

#### Debi's Tips



**Debi Gutierrez**

Host

- Consistency gives kids security.
- Schedules helps build trust between kids & child care providers.
- Inconsistency creates emotional anxiety.
- Allow for flexibility within the day
- Parents should be consistent when children are at home.

#### Expert Advice



**Moises Roman**

UCLA Early Care &  
Education Department

A schedule is the planning of a day by time, activity, etc. Children understand it as a routine; it is the way in which they learn what will or will not happen next. Schedules are made by adults (child care providers), while routines are the physical execution of the schedule that children, over a period of time, get used to.

Schedules and routines are important for children because they need to know what's coming next. If the schedule is consistent, children learn the pattern. Once a pattern is set children can infer, for instance, that lunch comes after music time. This way, there aren't too many unknowns.

Schedules help build trust between child care providers and children. Young children begin to understand that adults will take care of their needs on a regular basis.

When children have too many unknowns, anxiety builds up and they start showing emotional reactions to the inconsistency. For instance, they may cry or become irritable and take it out on other people. If they don't have regular routines it starts showing in different ways.

Let's say that a child is used to having lunch at 11:30 am every day. And for some reason, lunch is late and the child doesn't get to eat until 1:00 pm. You may see the child crying and being irritable. You can try to talk to them, but they will no longer enjoy the

things that they normally do. Breaking a schedule throws a child completely off. It's especially important for child care providers to maintain consistent schedules when caring for young children.

Parents should continue the consistency of the weekday schedules and routines when kids are at home. Parents will find that if the schedules are unpredictable on the weekends and evenings, children will exhibit inappropriate behavior.

Parents these days are extremely busy. But I recommend that they are consistent with two things – meals and naps. If these two areas are kept in schedule, their level of anxiety will drop; children will not be tired or hungry, two things that can be a great challenge for parents and children.

Other strategies to keep in mind are to have snacks with you at all times so that if you know meal time is coming and you can't eat exactly at 11:30, you can give your child a snack to diffuse the situation until you can get them to eat.

The best thing that a child care provider can do to bring kids back to a routine is to resume their own consistent schedules. This is especially important for kids after a three-day weekend or an extended family vacation because the kids are completely off their normal routine.

Some flexibility is important though. For example, if your schedule says your music time goes for 30 minutes and you're done in only 10 minutes because the children are telling you they are finished, then move on to the next activity on your schedule. Flexibility in that respect is fine. This applies to other things like play time, story time and quiet time. So if kids need more sleep during nap time, allow them to rest.

### **Child Care provider Comments**



**Talon**

Child care provider for 3 years

Every Monday morning, I begin our program in a big circle. I get all the kids to sit down and share what they did over the weekend. We get their attention and start to draw them back into our routine. This sets the stage for them to know that we are going to adhere to the schedules and routines of the program.



**Cynthia**

Child care provider for 25 years

Part of my program focuses on the involvement of parents. We talk to parents every day to share with them what happened. If the child was having a rough day, we talk about solutions.

### **Parent Comments**

My daughter's schedule is set by the child care she attends. Since she's there for the majority of the day, it sometimes works out that they establish the routine and as parents we follow through with it at home.



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**Joachim**

Father of 1-year-old  
daughter

We compare notes with the school every day. When we sign in every morning, we have to give the teachers a little report about what time she went to bed, what kind of night she had, what time she woke up, when she ate last, and anything else that might be important so that they can anticipate things. The same happens when we pick her up at the end of the day.

On the weekends, I've noticed that my daughter naturally sticks to the schedules and routines that she's used to, basically sleeping and eating around the same times as she would during the week while she is in care.

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