

Visual Schedules – Rachel Stoyanov

0:00 HI, I'm Rachel Stoyanov. Thanks for joining me for Healthy Talbot's video series on alleviating caregiver stress during the COVID Pandemic. Today, we'll talk a little about routines and schedules. A routine is important not only for your child, but for adults as well, because it allows us to have a structured framework to count on in a world that's anything less than predictable.

0:30 When we begin having children, routines emerge for every family. It begins as something that gets us out of the house, as we get ready for school and work, and then as we return home from daycare or work, we'll have a routine or a schedule that will emerge for mealtimes, for baths, and bedtime. Routines lead to schedules, and all families need that schedule! It develops a sense of normalcy, and for kids, a sense of security. Children fear the unknown, and whether that is something different on their dinner plate, or the changes that happen day to day with the pandemic, between school and work closures, medical appointments, and things that are happening all around them, that can create a sense of unease.

1:24 Even "good" changes are a big deal for children, whether that's the birth of a sibling, or even moving to a new home. Change does give us the opportunity to become more resilient as we grow and develop, but it can also be scary. Developing a routine for your family establishes a schedule for your life, and those schedules lead to healthy, constructive habits.

1:50 What kids are craving is a sense of consistency, and when things are consistent in our household, we find that it affects our lives in really positive ways. It can help a child know what time of day their body is winding down for sleep, or naptimes. It can give them the ability to sit through a meal, and eat something healthy and consistent. It can also help their bodies to be prepared for toileting and toilet training and the consistency of bowel movements. Children

who are working on a schedule also know when it is time to play, and play hard, and play indoors and out. And then, as they are faced with the opportunity to relax and unwind, it can help their bodies really take advantage of those calm, quiet times.

2:49 Children are developing independence every day – if we'll allow them to. It's important to take their cues and let them develop in their own way. Children develop confidence when they can be part of a team, and not just the littlest family member being told what to do. We want to give them a sense of pride, and the opportunity to do things that the grown ups around them are doing.

3:17 As parents, this also gives us the opportunity to relax a little, to enjoy their accomplishments, and to do for ourselves, as they are doing for themselves.. Routines can also really help an adult. It can help us to remember important things that we need to take care of, whether that's giving our child medication, or paying a bill on time; it can help us to remember things that we have scheduled whether that be appointments or something that we are looking forward to. The security of knowing that the things that need to be taken care of are managed allows us to maximize on our opportunities to relax and unwind with our families, or as grown ups, now that all the challenges have been met for the day.

4:06 Routines also really bond your family. Our children begin to really watch what happens in our household, and they know what to expect. So when your weekday routine is "rush rush" to be on time and get out the door for school and work, our children will begin to see that we celebrate our Saturday morning by having a special breakfast. They notice that routine begin to develop, too, when they are able to help you make a meal, or watch cartoons while you're eating, or just in the time that you are able to spend with one another. It's important to allow our children to see those schedules emerge and become a part of our routine life.

4:50 Our children know things happen differently during the work week than the weekend, and that gives them something to look forward to! As adults, we want

that, and our kids want it, too! It gives us a chance to get excited about Saturday coming, or to return home after a long day at school. The excitement that comes from predictability can also eliminate power struggles. This alleviates our stress as a caregiver, when our children are willing participants and want to help do things just because they are a part of your family team, and not because they are being told to do something.

5:32 The development of a schedule for your family is really important. Kids thrive when they feel like they are a teammate, and not “just” the littlest family member. Schedules are important, and some ideas you may not have tried to transition in your household are to use music between activities, you might put on a favorite song at bedtime to help your child unwind, or a peppy song in the morning to get them started. You can also try using lights as a way to encourage a transition to a different time in their schedule; softer lights as we transition to a quieter activity, and brighter lights, or opening up the windows and blinds when we are trying to get peppy and get moving.

6:22 Some families find that using a timer is really beneficial, and that can help us transition from one thing to the next. Whether that’s as many minutes as they need to clean up after themselves, or time *before* bedtime, or time before the next activity, the use of a timer can be really helpful. You can use different types of clocks or visual timers for your kids, or you can also use timers that you’d find on your cell phone or ipad. Children enjoy interacting with those – punching the buttons, and being a part of helping.

7:00 Again, we’re about building up their skills and their confidence, and including them. We’re not taking away that opportunity from them. One thing that you guys may find really beneficial is the use of a Visual Schedule, like the one I have here, A visual schedule uses sentence strips and a visual schedule holder, like this one, and sort of breaks down their day, or that activity, into smaller chunks.

7:30 So what I have done here is a schedule for a child who may be about ten years of age, and lots of families notice, at school, they have these schedules and they are really beneficial. They are easy to pick up and have at home. In fact, a schedule board like this one is an incentive that is a part of this project. You may want to choose one like this for your midlevel incentive - a Visual Schedule Board. So this schedule breaks down a morning routine for a child that's about ten. You see I have seven items here, and then something to look forward to. As you are moving through your morning routine, depending on your child, you may mix this up a little bit.

8:14 Some kids want to be a part of it by taking the cards out and storing them. Some families will find if they store them on the bottom, that works, others will find if they turn it over, that that's empowering to their kids. You are the expert on your own child and you know what works best for them. So we encourage you to work on that together. As we move through the schedule for this child, we start by taking time for the bathroom and brushing teeth, then our child will feed the cat, come down and have breakfast, pack a lunch, get dressed for school, do their hair and wash up, then a reminder for shoes, coat and backpack as we walk out the door, and then always leaving something to look forward to – so you can try to build something in your schedule. For example, Thursdays for this child would be Piano day – but maybe you would use this space to remind them to pack a snack for an after school activity or club, or that Grandma's picking them up. This is a good way of giving your child advanced notice that's something's going to happen, so they can count on it. Again, we are looking for consistency and structure so that they have something to look forward to and have a framework.

9:31 For an older child, you can have more steps to their routine, but even in the youngest child, two year olds benefit from a Visual Schedule. That's why you'll see lots of preschools use these and empower their kids to be a part of the schedule as they day moves on. You'll find that kids are great schedule keepers, and like to keep their routine because they are in control of it – that is why they like it so much!

10:03 So for the younger child that is PRE – reading, the use of images is really effective. You can find them online just using clip art, you can clip them out of magazines, or you can use pictures of your child doing that activity. For the youngest kids, that is really effective for them to see that “this is Michael in bed”, and “this is Matthew having dinner”. You may take a day to take photographs of your family, and have those printed out, and that is a really effective way to teach YOUR child how to control his or her schedule.

10:42 So for a child that may be three years old, we have images there for using the bathroom, for having breakfast, for getting ready, and then for getting their coat, shoes and bag for school or daycare. Each routine is different, so you can store these cards down at the bottom, and interchange them. You could use one set of cards for a morning routine, and then have a second or third set for after school – this helps us sort of navigate homework times and chores – things that are less desired – we’re going to allow our child to have some control over that by using our schedule. Then, you can have a schedule for bed time. That will help your child feel like they are a part of the day’s routine, and they can predict the things that are coming.

11:39 I hope you have found this video helpful. If you have any other questions, or if we can help in any way, please reach out to us at Healthy Talbot. Thanks for joining us!