

Routines: Tools for Your Child's Development¹

Darius, who's almost three and has albinism, was playing in the living room when his dad came in, carrying a yellow rubber duck. "Darius, let's go wash Mr. Quacker," he said. Darius laughed as his dad squeaked the duck and immediately headed toward the bathroom. As soon as they got there, Darius began pulling off his clothes and, with a gentle reminder from his dad, put them in the laundry basket. His dad then had him touch the water before getting in to make sure it wasn't too hot.

After Darius played for a few minutes with Mr. Quacker and his other bath toys, his dad encouraged Darius to look around for the blue washcloth and bar of soap. Together, they washed each part of his body, as his dad named them. Then Darius's dad had him look for the red shampoo bottle and helped open the top of it. After Darius's hair was washed, his dad lets him know it was time to get out of the tub by holding open a big, bright blue towel. Once he was dry, Darius helped pull on his pajama top and bottom. Now he was ready for story time and then off to bed.

Because Darius's bath-story-bedtime routine is the same every evening, it's easy for him to anticipate each step, do it without much prompting, and feel a sense of independence. This one routine helps Darius practice a whole range of skills—increasing his manual dexterity, learning new words and concepts, and practicing the use of his limited vision. The routine also has a beginning and an end. The phrase, "Let's go wash Mr. Quacker," tells Darius that it's time for his bath-bedtime routine to start. Leaving the bathroom in his pajamas signals that the bath routine is now finished.

You may have many similar opportunities to involve your child in routines. Think about the things you and she do together almost every day, from self-help tasks like getting washed to playing games. You can build routines around these sorts of activities to help her anticipate what's going to happen and provide opportunities to develop concept skills, language skills, motor skills, and social skills.

Why Are Routines Important?

Routines help all children feel assured that the world is an orderly place. But they are especially valuable for children who are visually impaired and may not be able to see what the people around them are doing. Establishing routines helps them develop a sense of cause and effect and what comes next throughout the course of the day.

¹ <http://www.familyconnect.org/info/browse-by-age/infants-and-toddlers/parenting-and-family-life-iaandt/routines-tools-for-your-childs-development/1235>



Helpful Tips for Establishing Routines

- Don't expect your child to do an entire routine on her own. Look for small ways in which she can participate in different parts of the routine. For example, if you and she enjoy dancing together, let her feel the CD cases to find the one you've put a tactile or braille mark on to signal that it's the dance CD. You might be the one to take the disk out of its case and put it in the player, but then let her press the play button to get things rolling.
- If your child has low vision, look for ways to add color or high contrast to items you and your child use routinely. If part of her dinner routine is to feed herself using a spoon, make sure she has a spoon and bowl she can easily see on her highchair tray.
- If your child is blind or has very low vision, think about ways to add textures or braille to items she uses. If part of her morning routine includes brushing her hair, buy her a brush that has a distinctive handle that lets her know it's hers.
- Be consistent in naming things. It may confuse your child if you call her cup a cup one day and a mug the next day. It's important that she understand what the word "cup" means before she starts hearing it referred to as a mug. The next step will be for her to realize that the same object can have two different names.
- When you see that your child is anticipating what will happen next, you'll know you've succeeded in establishing a routine for her. You can recognize this by her actions, even if she's too young to tell you in words. For example, after you put on her socks, she may look or reach down for her shoes, letting you know she understands that shoes go on her feet after she has socks on.
- After your child can do one step in a routine consistently, add a new step for her to learn, such as having her help you put on each shoe. A toddler's attention span tends to be short, so plan small, logical next steps in which she can participate partially as the two of you go through your routines each day.

