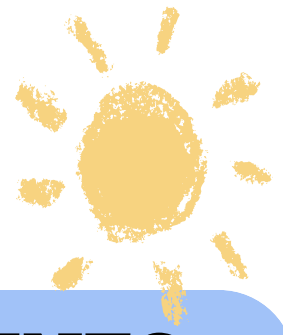


A Way of Being with Children

Practical Tools for Connection, Safety, and HOPE in Early Childhood



PREDICTABILITY AND ROUTINES

Building Safety and Trust Through Everyday Routines

Predictable routines help children feel safe in a big, busy world. When children know what to expect, their nervous systems can relax, allowing them to focus on learning, playing, and building relationships. Predictability gives children a sense of control, which reduces anxiety, power struggles, and emotional meltdowns. Those routines are not about strict schedules or perfection. They are about creating reliable daily rhythms that help children feel grounded and supported, which, when guided by a caring adult, become a powerful tool for emotional regulation and resilience.

Routines Support Emotional Well-Being

Children thrive when their days follow familiar patterns. Predictable routines help children:

- Feel secure and confident
- Transition more smoothly between activities
- Build independence and responsibility
- Recover more quickly from stress

Routines also strengthen relationships. Shared rituals, like bedtime stories, morning check-ins, or goodbye routines, reinforce connection and create moments children can count on, even during times of stress.

Visual reminders of routines without adult directives can also be very helpful for older children, as they provide a sense of control and independence in executing their routines. Pictures can be used with younger children and, when coupled with gentle verbal cues, can be an incredibly powerful tool to help them better understand and follow schedules and routines.



Building Predictable Routines

1. Create Consistent Daily Routines

- Focus on key parts of the day such as mornings, mealtimes, and bedtime. Keep routines simple and realistic.
- Consistency matters more than exact timing.

2. Use Visual Schedules

- Pictures, charts, or simple drawings help children understand what comes next.
- Visuals support independence and reduce repeated reminders.

3. Build Small, Meaningful Rituals

- Add songs, stories, hugs, handshakes, or special phrases to routines.
- Rituals create emotional connection and comfort, and can ease transitions.

4. Prepare Children for Transitions

- Give gentle reminders before changes (“Five more minutes”).
- Transitions feel safer when they are predictable.

5. Stay Flexible With Support

- Life happens, and routines may shift.
- When changes occur, acknowledge the change as well as the associated feelings, and reconnect.
- Flexibility paired with reassurance maintains safety.

A Way of Being Reminder

Predictability and connection create safety and trust. When routines are guided by warmth, consistency, and understanding, children learn they can depend on both the structure around them and the people who care for them.

Everyday Tips for Routines That Support Regulation

Start Small

Begin with one routine, such as at bedtime or in the morning, and build from there. Success with one routine builds confidence for both children and caregivers.

Use Songs and Signals

Songs, clapping patterns, or visual cues help children transition without feeling rushed or overwhelmed. Familiar signals reduce stress and resistance.

Encourage Effort, Not Perfection

Positive feedback strengthens motivation and cooperation. Notice and acknowledge when children follow routines or try their best:

- “You remembered the next step.”
- “You worked hard to get ready.”

Keep Language Simple and Positive

Use clear, calm words that guide rather than command. Positive language supports understanding and reduces power struggles.

Connect During Routines

Using routines as opportunities for connection, like a smile, a shared laugh, or a comforting word, can turn daily tasks into relationship-building moments.

Plan for Transitions and Changes

When routines need to shift, give children notice and reassurance. Simple warnings like “In five minutes, it will be time to clean up” help children adjust and feel prepared. When changes happen unexpectedly, acknowledging the change and associated feelings while staying connected helps children maintain their sense of safety.

Visual Routine Example (include pictures for younger children)

Morning

Wake Up
Use the bathroom and get dressed
Eat breakfast
Brush teeth
School time

Evening

Clean up toys
Dinner
Bath and pajamas
Story time and cuddle
Lights out and sleep



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