



The place of routines in the lives of children

This summary exists to share with educators, and other interested people, some recent key findings from brain development research. Having an understanding of how a child's brain grows and changes is vital knowledge for educators to have, so that they can best support the children in their care to achieve the best outcomes possible.

Routines can be thought of as a series of patterns that we perform almost every day. For young children, routines provide consistency, comfort and a sense of security for young children. Knowing what will happen next helps to give children emotional stability and security, helping them to learn to trust that caring adults will provide what they need.

First, let's look at what the research says.

The recent key findings about how children's brains grow and develop tell us:

- ➔ Routines are like instructions—they guide children's actions toward a specific goal. Routines can be used for many reasons, but two of the most important are ensuring children's health and safety, and helping children learn positive, responsible behavior.
- ➔ Routines support the development of social skills and social interactions. Greetings, talking with others, sharing meals – all of these are examples of routine times ripe with opportunities for learning valuable social and language skills
- ➔ Routines can support children to manage transition times, such as one activity to the next, or transitioning from one caregiver to the next.
- ➔ Routines offer the chance to build self-confidence, curiosity, social skills, self-control, communication skills, and more. While routines are often dismissed as the mundane, everyday "have to" moments, these times are actually valuable opportunities to nurture self confidence and self esteem in children.
- ➔ Stable routines allow children to anticipate what will happen next. This gives young children confidence, and also a sense of control.
- ➔ Managing daily routines helps children to develop independence and perseverance, valuable life skills which will support children as they grow and learn.

So what do these findings mean for educators?

They mean that the experiences children have while in our care are important – they impact on their brain development, and are part of the important "relationship learning" that helps brains grow. Routines help children learn how their world is organized, and what they need to do in order to interact successfully in their world (Sussman, 2011) – in order for children to learn how their world is organized and what they must do in order to interact successfully within it, educators must provide consistency, reliability and predictability within the routines and structures of the day. Educators must recognise the importance of routine – of providing a sense of continuity throughout the day, as well as letting children know what to expect next.

The findings also, perhaps most importantly, remind us that children need enjoyable and meaningful routines to shape habits of behaviour, build self control, and experience a sense of mastery. Patterns of behaviour (sometimes known as procedural knowledge) that children learn in the early years often become internalized personal routines, which we take with us into any new environment. Having these internalized patterns can reduce stress, because they do not require conscious thought or energy.

Parents are, obviously, the main influence on how a child develops – we know that parents are children's first teachers, and the people who have been with the child from birth. It is important that we, as educators, support parents in their journey. Supporting parents to implement consistent routines between home and care, and liaising with parents about how routine moments happen in the home environment, services can build a lasting partnership with children and families which will improve outcomes for children.

For some parents, the implementation of routines and consistency may be challenging, owing to many circumstances. It is important for educators to model consistency, persistence and reliability, while supporting individual parent and family differences. It is important for educators to reinforce the message that routine will support children to feel safe, secure and supported.

Routines provide the two key ingredients for learning: relationships and repetition. In the everyday moments, children are experiencing situations which are the foundations for stability, and life long lessons about trust, regulation and security. ■

Further Resources

To access more resources around routine in the IPSP online library (www.ipsplibrary.net.au), search for terms such as "routine", "social" or "partnerships".

Read more about brain development from:

Zero to Three National Centre for Infants, Toddlers and Families: http://main.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter_key_social_routines

Maggie Dent: <http://www.maggiedent.com/content/blog/3-rs-family-happiness-resilience-routine-relaxation>

Or watch this video which explores routines in the home environment: http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/routines_aboriginal_parents_video.html

If you would like further support, please email the project officer, at enquiries@gowriesa.org.au

References

Department of Education Training and Employment 2014. *Learning Independence*, DETE, Queensland

Zero to Three National Centre for Infants, Toddlers and Families, 2002, *Child Care Routines – The value and Importance*, Zero to Three, Washington

Zero to Three National Centre for Infants, Toddlers and Families, 2014, *Love, learning and routines*, Zero to Three, Washington