

## Time Management for Kids<sup>1</sup>

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In an age of busy lifestyles and two career families, parents spend a lot of energy trying to manage their time more effectively. However, we rarely consider how important it is to manage our children's time as well.

Busy work and home schedules emphasize the importance of working efficiently on the job, and parenting efficiently at home. It would be silly to parent our children like a manager supervising our employees or an employee managing our work load. However, helping your child structure their day makes it easier for everyone to get things done. It also makes the time we spend with our children more enjoyable.

Just as parents transition from the work to home environment, today's children are frequently shuttled from home to school to day care to the sitter's then back to home again.

It is these transition times — the times when kids are between activities — that they are most likely misbehave. "Idle hands are the devil's playground," may be a cliché, but it holds some truth. Kids rarely misbehave when they are absorbed in enjoyable or challenging activities. However, as we all know, it's impossible to keep a child involved in these types of activities all day long.

This report provides advice to parents on managing their child's time. It focuses on critical transition times across a child's daily life when parents say they have the most problems.

Most parents find that by using the following strategies, they are able to increase the amount of time spent on positive interactions with their children while greatly reducing the amount of time they spend punishing and scolding their children.

Most of these strategies require time and effort from parents in the beginning to get their children to follow a schedule. However, by following these strategies, parents often find that they end up with more time in the end.

### Morning Routine

**"It's like waking a bear from their cave."**

That's how one mother describes the daily struggle to wake her six-year-old son and get him ready for school.

Waking a child and getting through the "morning routine" is one of the most common complaints of parents. We shouldn't be surprised. Most of us

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1. This document is Fact Sheet FCS 2111, a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: May 2003. First Published as HE 2099: May 1996. Reviewed: May 2003. Please visit the EDIS web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>
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despise the idea of getting out of a warm, cozy bed to face the pressures of another day.

Children are no different. In fact, they have a few special excuses for being so grumpy in the morning. Children tend to sleep more deeply than adults. Research shows that they also need more sleep than adults, with most requiring a minimum of 8-10 hours of sleep a night.

Adding to the problem, many adults don't get enough sleep during the week (they usually catch up on the week-end). So parents are often grumpy in the morning and in no mood to put with such "nonsense."

Here are some tips for establishing a more pleasant morning routine:

▪ **Get up early.**

- Make sure you wake up at least 15-20 minutes before your children so that you can focus on what you need to get done to prepare for your day.

Many parents find it easiest to complete the majority of their personal morning routine (e.g., shower, get dressed, etc.) before waking their children.

After waking the kids, parents work on making breakfast or lunches so they can easily check up on the kids' progress on their morning routine.

▪ **Make a chart.**

Parents often complain that their child always "forgets" to do something when they're getting ready in the morning. Truth is, many of us "grizzly bears" are forgetful in the morning.

- Help your kids to remember by creating a morning routine chart (see *Sample Chart*).
- Include things like washing their face, brushing their teeth, getting dressed, making the bed, etc.

- List all the morning activities you can reasonably expect your child to complete on the left side of a piece of paper.
- List the days of the week across the top of the paper.
- Give your child a sticker or a star for every morning activity they successfully complete on time.
- Reward them with praise each time you give them a sticker.
- Give a bigger reward at the end of the morning, or for older children at the end of the week, for successfully completing a number of morning activities on time.
- Some examples of rewards include:
  - ▶ choosing a snack or dessert for lunch
  - ▶ earning 5-10 minutes of free time before school
  - ▶ and choosing a fun week-end activity (big reward).
- **Don't demand perfection**, especially if your child has not performed many of these activities on their own before.
  - Reward them for improvements even if it just means completing one activity a day.
  - Focusing on progress rather than perfection encourages your child to become more enthusiastic and take pride in completing their morning routine.

### **Going into Grizzly's Cave (Waking Up Your Child)**

Believe it or not, many parents say that they are afraid to wake up their child. While they're probably not really afraid of their child, they have come to hate the daily power struggle of waking them up.

Now that you understand why waking up is so difficult for many children and you're armed with your morning routine chart, it's time to give these strategies a try.

- Start the night before.
  - Explain to your child that you would like to help them learn to wake up and get ready for their day like a big boy or girl.
  - Focus on these two messages:
    - ▶ that you're **helping** them to do something they want to do, even if they don't (after all, part of being an effective parent is talking your children into doing things that are good for them); and
    - ▶ that of course they **want** to be able to complete their morning routine like **big boys and girls**.
  - Make the morning routine an opportunity for your children to achieve and succeed. Don't make it sound like another set of rules and limits on their behavior.
  - Show them the "Morning Routine Chart" that you have made and even ask them to help you finish it by drawing pictures of the activities, etc.
  - Answer any questions your children may have and tell them that you're excited about tomorrow and that you think it will be fun.
- On the next morning, make sure that you've gotten up with enough time to prepare for your child's morning routine. You need to reserve some time to wake them.
  - Start your child's morning quietly and give them time (3-5 minutes) to get up.
  - Wake them with a soft and pleasant voice. If they have a radio alarm clock, make sure it's set on a station that plays soothing music and make sure the volume is low. Your objective is simply to get your child to begin waking.

Tell them that it's time to get up and start their day.

**Do not give them any assignments for their morning routine yet.** These instructions will only discourage your child and convince them that they should hold out and stay in bed as long as possible.

- If your child is still in bed after 3-5 minutes, remind them to get up while opening the curtains or blinds to let more light into the room. Again, use a pleasant tone of voice that is as loud as normal speech. Do not threaten or warn your child if they do not get up immediately.
- Return in a minute or two and turn on a radio or T.V. outside your child's reach. You don't need to make them so loud that they disturb everyone else in the house. However they should be loud enough to keep your child from returning to sleep.
- Warn your child in a firm tone of voice that they need to get out of bed and prepare for their day or else they will lose stickers for their morning routine.

Make sure that your child is actually resisting getting up and has not fallen back to a sleep.

### For the Really Stubborn Child

If your child is awake but still refuses to get out of bed, you have entered the most complicated part of the morning routine.

If your child is older (ages 9-10 and up), remind them of the *natural consequences* of their refusal to get out of bed. For example, they will have to rush through their morning routine and may miss the school bus and could be late for school.

This approach depends on the child caring whether they get to school on time or not. It typically doesn't work with younger children, children who are nervous about school, and children who dislike school.

The advantage of this approach is that it links their behavior with a *natural consequence*, something that you as a parent don't have control over. It encourages your child to take more responsibility for getting ready for school. However, it also demands that the parent find a way to get the child to school if they end up running late.

For younger children, parents must work to make a connection between the child's behavior and its consequences.

Usually this is done by withdrawing privileges if the child doesn't complete their morning routine on time (e.g., they can't pick their own lunch snack, no television in the evening, no video games for a day, etc.).

Another excellent option is to make the child go to bed 30 minutes early the next evening. Parents who use this option should tell their children that they are going to bed early because they don't seem to be getting enough sleep and are having trouble getting up on time. This message reinforces the idea that the child has some control over their bedtime and **has the choice** to go to bed later if they complete their morning routine on time.

Still another choice is to wake your child 30 minutes early the next day. However, this strategy can mean that parents must get up earlier as well.

## After School

The transition from school to home is often a difficult one for children. Many kids are bored at school and are excited about coming home to play. They're also excited to see their parents and friends.

It's important to spend some time with your children when they first see you. Once again, setting aside a little time now will save you more time in the long run.

Postpone homework until after dinner, your children have just spent all day in school. The last thing they want to do is more school work. Also, let household chores wait at least until they have been able to play awhile.

Dedicate at least 20 minutes to simply playing with your children. Let them pick the activities they would like to do, within reason.

Make sure you talk to your child while you're playing. Ask them about their day. You can find out a lot about their mood this way. You also teach them to get your attention in a positive way rather than misbehaving to get noticed.

Active play that involves running, jumping, or other physical exercise is good right after school. Let your child work out some of their energy while you can make sure they're not getting into trouble. It's also a good time to work in a little exercise yourself.

Some children won't choose active play at this time. They'll want to do something quietly or by themselves. That's okay. The key is to offer to play with your child, but let them choose what they want to do.

## After Dinner

Dedicate this time to having your child complete their chores and school work.

Some parents find that it is best to have their child complete some chores before dinner. This strategy is fine, especially if the child's daily chores take over 15-20 minutes to complete.

Just remember to delay those chores until after you have spent some "quality time" with your children.

It is usually best, however, to delay homework until after dinner. This plan gives the child enough time after school to have some fun and schedule his or her homework at a time when the house is relatively quiet and parents are typically available to help with school assignments.

Many parents make the mistake of allowing their child to get involved with some other play activity right after dinner and before they start their homework. Do not fall into this trap. Your child will learn to make excuses, or make themselves scarce, to avoid doing their homework.

Doing homework is a lot like tearing off a band-aid, it's best to get it over with all at once instead of dragging out the pain.

Tell your child that they are expected to work on homework right after dinner and should not stop until it is completed. It's okay to give your child **3-5 minute breaks** during homework as rewards for working hard.

Children have short attention spans and frequently need these breaks. However, don't let them get too involved in other activities. Let them talk with you, play with a pet, even walk outside for a couple of minutes.

**Do not allow them anywhere near the T. V., video games, or other "really fun" activities.**

Tell your child that they must complete all of their homework before they are allowed to have free time as a reward.

Make free time full of the activities that your child enjoys most (e.g., playing with you, watching T.V., etc.) Use this opportunity for *quality time* with your child.

Remind them of the fun activities they will be able to do as soon as they finish their homework.

### Avoid Power Struggles

There is rarely a need to punish your child for their attempts to get out of doing homework. Homework is "painful" for many children, especially if the lessons aren't easy for them.

Your best strategy is to have your child complete their homework in a place where you can keep an eye on them.

If they need some help, give it to them. However, don't get sucked into doing all of their assignments for them.

If your child refuses to do their homework, keep them in front of the books and away from other activities until it is time for them to start getting ready for bed.

A stubborn child may sit there for a night or two, but they will quickly get the message that the sooner they complete their homework, the sooner they get to do what they want.

## Bedtime

The key to making bedtime a calm and enjoyable transition for your child is to prepare them early.

Everyone needs time to calm down before going to bed, especially if they want to sleep well. Children are no different. They just don't get to choose when they go to bed.

**Note: Don't let your children choose when they go to bed.** Put them on a schedule. Children need lots of sleep. Their body needs to adjust to a fixed schedule of going to sleep every night at the same time.

Here's a good rule of thumb: Make sure your children have at least a half hour of *quiet* time before bed when they can sit and read, listen to music, play quietly, etc.

This quiet time will leave them more calm and better prepared for sleep when you tell them it's time for bed. Bathing, grooming, changing into bedclothes, and getting ready for the next day should be done before this quiet time.

Just like the morning routine, **create a chart** for your child's bedtime routine. Reward them with stickers or stars for every activity they complete on time.

Don't expect perfection, especially early on. Just look for progress and praise your child for their efforts.

Give your child a bigger reward if they complete their bedtime routine on time (e.g., watching a special T.V. show or video, a *light* snack, story time with you, etc.).

Make sure these rewards are calm activities. **No horseplay** this late at night, it defeats the purpose.

Remind your child that they will give up this reward if they do not complete their bedtime routine on time.

### Dealing with the "Ineeda's"

Just when you feel you have successfully gotten your child to bed, along come the "Ineeda's."

"Mommie, 'Ineeda' a drink,"

"Daddy, 'Ineeda' cookie,"

"'Ineeda' use the bathroom."

The "Ineeda's" are usually your child's last attempt to avoid going to bed on time.

The good news is that you can head off the "Ineeda's" with a few simple strategies.

- Ask your child if they need a drink of water or to use the bathroom when you take them to bed. Tell them that this is their last chance.
  - It's okay to go into the room to check on them later if they're complaining if they really need something. After all, we wouldn't want to ignore our children if they were ill or needed to use the bathroom. However, they shouldn't come out of their bedroom without your permission.
- Escort them to bed.
  - Make sure they're tucked in and talk or read with them a little.
  - Don't make it a habit of reading to them until they're asleep. They will learn to demand this over time.
  - It's best to start early in teaching your children how to calm themselves and go to sleep.

- Teach your children to *self-soothe*.
  - For example, help them relax in bed by focusing on deep breathing. Slowing their breathing helps cue their body to go to sleep.
    - ▶ Tell them to concentrate on breathing slowly while pushing out their belly and making a soft "hah" sound.
    - ▶ Ask them to close their eyes and think of a relaxing place like the beach, a field, or floating on a cloud (be careful, no matter what they say, Disney World is not a relaxing place for children — or adults).
  - Some children enjoy singing softly with their parent to calm them down.

Just like other critical times of the day, make sure that you don't get into a power struggle with your child.

If they cannot complete their bedtime routine on time, simply take away their bedtime reward.

If they continue to struggle with their bedtime routine or refuse to stay in their bedroom, consider making an earlier bedtime the next day.

Explain to them that you want to help them learn to go to bed on time and that they seem to need a little extra time to calm down before bed. Emphasize the message that they have the choice on whether their bedtime will be earlier or later.

Most children will quickly learn to follow this schedule so they can enjoy as much time with the family as possible.

# ☺MORNING CHECKLIST☺

Things to Do	M	T	W	T	F	SAT	SUN	TOTAL
Wake up on time								
Wash Face								
Make Bed								
Get Dressed								
Comb Hair								
Eat Breakfast								
Brush Teeth								
Out the Door on Time								
<b>TOTAL</b>								