# The Importance of Rituals and Routines During Trying Times



Experiencing stress can be unsettling for all family members causing changes in mood, sleep patterns, eating habits, and even family interactions. Just as stress effects everyone differently, it can also comes from a variety of causes.

Stress can be caused by **normal life changes,** such as the addition of a baby or pet into the family or moving. Major family events or community disruptions like **divorce or natural disasters** can also cause a great deal of stress.

Despite the cause of stress, all family members can benefit from **special family rituals and predictable routines**. As families engage in these important aspects of family life, all can experience healthier outcomes.

## **FAMILY RITUALS**

Many families engage in repeated activities that have meaning: these are family rituals. Engaging in rituals helps foster a sense of family pride, continuity, and closeness. During trying times, children and families benefit from engaging in family rituals as they provide a sense of connection to others.

Most families think that rituals only involve holidays or special events, but family rituals are often much broader than that. Think of the special, meaningful activities you do with your family. Even simple, daily activities like reading a family story together before bed or dancing in the kitchen while making dinner are examples of family rituals.

### Ideas for rituals to try during trying times include:

- At family dinner time, have each family member share one kind thing they did that day.
- Implement "family cuddle time." At the same time each day, everyone in the family cuddles on the couch together.
- Prior to bed, end the day with a goodnight song, a special way that you say goodnight, or read a few favorite stories each night.
- During meal preparation, have each family member contribute a task or help out in some way.
- Create a family message board. Each day assign each family member the responsibility of writing a thought for the day or other positive message.

When times get tough, the value of conversation about the current crisis can buffer the stress experienced by the adults and children alike. Connecting and communicating as a family builds a strong foundation that can carry you through the difficult times.





# **FAMILY ROUTINES**

Family routines are regular, daily activities that families complete. Many family routines involve activities that need to be done in and around the home, for the benefit of all family members. Activities like getting the mail, setting the table, walking the dog, and doing homework are all examples of family routines. Routines differ from rituals in that, while they are also completed daily, there is no special meaning attached to the activity. Even so, engaging in daily routines provides a sense of stability, security, and comfort as routines maintain predictability in life.

In times of stress, maintaining family routines supports the overall health of everyone in the household. Children and adults thrive on regular routines and clear assignment of responsibilities for tasks or roles. The consistent, predictable nature of routines provides way to effectively manage stress. When families experience disruptions of daily life, family routines are often impacted. To enhance feelings of regularity and security, all family members should strive to maintain normal routines as much as possible for maximum benefit.

# Tips for maintaining your child's routine include:

- **Set a clear, daily routine**. Children need consistency, especially if they have had a lot of uncertainty in their lives. As much as possible, try to maintain a normal daily schedule. Have your child rise and go to bed at the same time each day. Get dressed and prepare for the day as you normally would. Go about your daily business with as little as disruption as possible.
- Try to make your daily life as predictable as possible. If the daily routine will be disrupted in any way, tell your child so they will know what to expect. Understand that disruptions in routine also disrupt the sense of security your child needs. Keeping your daily life as predictable as possible may help avoid unwanted behavior responses from your child.
- Allow for flexibility. While routines are critically important to a child during uncertain times, recognize that having a flexible routine may also work well. For some families, sticking to a rigid daily schedule is a very useful tool (9-10 a.m.- academic time, 10-11 a.m. reading time). Other families may be less structured, but still have a routine to follow (30 minutes of play each day, 20 minutes of reading, and so on.) If your family is following a more flexible routine, structure can still be provided in rise/wake times and family mealtimes. Find a routine that works for your family and stick to it.
- Be prepared for questions. If your child is anxious, they may ask many
  questions as they fear any changes in routine. They may ask what will happen
  if you leave or what if you become ill. What if questions allow a glimpse into
  your child's fears and concerns. Provide lots of reassurance and help calm your
  child by providing regular meals, regular hours, a stable routine, and lots of
  hugs.

# Reference

Adapted from Reduce Stress with Family Routines and Rituals: Parenting Again - University of Illinois Extension

https://web.extension.illinois.edu/grandparents/article.cfm?
ID=5100&IssueID=5215.



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