

## The Power of Family Routines

This year COVID-19 transformed students' Spring Break into an unfortunate version of early Summer Break - no school routines to organize the day, yet schoolwork remains. Most students are working less overall, while most parents are working more than ever, and probably from home. Both parents and kids are struggling to find silver linings, though opportunities exist. As a parent, if you observe your kids decompensating with increased meltdowns, irritability, and tense sibling confrontations, then consider harnessing the *power of family routines* to spread some good.

We humans are creatures of habit with an affinity for rhythms and routines to keep us grounded. When life is predictable we relax into autopilot; when change occurs we wake up and ask, "What's going on and how will this change effect me?" The answer to those question is especially important to kids, who, by necessity, mostly follow the lead of adults. Routines offer predictability and a reliability, allowing kids to conserve mental energy to deal with daily frictions. Effective routines reduce stress and anxiety and support increased healthy habits and tighter familial bonds.

Perhaps no set of changes during our lifetimes (and certainly our children's lifetimes) have been more rattling than weathering social distancing and distance learning and work during the COVID-19 pandemic. With significantly more time at home, many parents and kids are know intuitively that healthy routines bring psychological benefits, but designing and implementing routines is easier said than done. Routines help us calm chaos, but it's hard to come up with plans while navigating chaos. (How can everything important get done? How can I keep my child entertained?)

[At Kids On Up Psychotherapy](#) we take pride in helping families create sustainable routines that promote growth and collaboration, with familiar daily "anchors" that include school work, meal times, family fun, and sleep. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Work with your child to create a "**wants and needs list**" from which to design a routine. Collaboration encourages buy-in, and when kids and teens have ownership over parts of their routines they feel more in control and satisfied.
- Include **physical activity** throughout the day. Even for kids who are not typically outdoorsy or sporty, a day outside the home pre-COVID included quite a bit of walking from place to place and movement in play and PE class.
- Especially when it comes to unfamiliar components of new routines, **start small** and slowly include more items as you see the system working for your child.
- Set aside time to **review** daily schedules and expectations with your child. This will ensure that they understand what is expected of them as well as when they can have free or play time.

- Consider **visual** cues and scheduling formats. While visuals always make sense for younger kids, we also find it helpful during difficult times to revive visual tools for older kids who graduated from those tools previously. Examples of visuals include charts, a clock labeled with activities, or strategically placed sticky notes.
- Schedule an easy task to gather momentum early in the day, then hop into a harder task, such as classwork, for completion soon after, when your child is still **fresh and rested**. Save most easier tasks for later in the day.

As always, we are here to help. [Kids On Up Psychotherapy](#) now offers private teletherapy sessions. Brief, one-time check-ins and ongoing therapy are available. Please consider psychotherapy as part of your care plan.

Stay Well,

Kids On Up Psychotherapy Staff