

Views from VanDeWalle

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August 25, 2021

Establishing a Routine in the New School Year

The last year and a half have uprooted most people's routines, sense of security, and understanding of how the world functions. Social distancing, virtual meetings, online learning, and sanitizing are a common place in today's world. Thanks to science and the effectiveness of the vaccine life is returning to more familiar times. Attending in-person classes, eating at restaurants, going to sporting events or concerts, and celebrating milestones with friends and family are some of the activities that might take some adjustments. As children and youth head back to school here are some tips to help establish routine and structure that children and youth need to grow and develop.

- Engage children and youth in planning a routine together. Adults and youth may have differing ideas about ways to spend time so, start by having a conversation about expectations. Determine what activities are non-negotiable. Be clear about the expectations must be met. If possible, offer some choices for when these "must happen" activities take place.
- Find a healthy balance between flexibility and consistency when establishing a routine. Creating plans that are too ambitious or rigid will be difficult to monitor and enforce.
- Create a balanced routine that includes time for unstructured activity and fun. Make time for playing outside, reading a book for enjoyment, engaging in an art or craft project, having a family game night, or cooking together. Remember that it is important not to overschedule the day. Both adults and youth need free time.
- Maintain self-care routines. Eating a good diet, getting enough sleep (the CDC recommends that children and youth get at least eight hour a night), and engaging in regular exercise and hygiene habits are a key for success.
- Successful routines should include intentional ways to keep young people connected to the important people in their lives. Staying connected to those we care about helps manage our feelings, become less isolated, and maintains a sense of mental well-being.
- Establish times of self-reflection such as meditation and journaling in a daily routine. Times of self-reflection can help one gain a new perspective, be a healthy way to manage feelings and thoughts, and express gratitude.

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It is important to remember as a society we have experienced many different emotions, situations and events over the last 18 months. The beginning of the school year is a great time to help young people establish routine and structure for them to develop into caring, confident, and capable adults.

More information and resources about youth social-emotional development in challenging times can be found at <https://4h.unl.edu/supporting-young-people-through-change> or by contacting your [local county Nebraska Extension office](#).

Originally written by Dr. Jill Lingard in 2020

Modified by Dr. Michelle Krehbiel in 8/2021