



Views from VanDeWalle

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Easing into the New School Year

While there are still a couple weeks of summer left for most youth, the start of school is quickly approaching. One of my colleagues, Lisa Poppe, Extension Educator serving Dodge County provided some great tips on routine and the important role that has in getting children off to a smooth start.

First, Routine Matters! Family routines are different from the family schedule...and probably more important. What's the difference? Schedules tell you exactly when something is going to happen. Routines, on the other hand, consist of the regular actions that occur for a specific event each time it occurs, such as bedtime, getting ready to go somewhere, or dinner time. When we put routines in place for our families, it brings a sense of security that children really need. When kids know what to expect, and know what's expected of them, their behavior will also improve.

Many times, routines happen naturally in our lives. We go through the same ritual as we get ready for bed, for instance, because certain things just must be done before we go to bed. Other times, routines will have to be learned. Having the kids help set the table, sitting down to dinner together as a family, and then everyone clearing the table as dinner is finished would be a family routine that most of us would have to learn. There are certain event routines that normally benefit every family. Bedtime, morning routines, getting ready to go somewhere, homework, and mealtimes are included in this list.

It's impossible for someone else to tell you exactly what these routines should be. Every family is different. What works for one may not work for another. We can offer some suggestions to give you an idea of what a routine would consist of. But ultimately, you must create your own family routines with your own family.

Bedtime routines are very important to children. It will help them feel more comfortable as they go to sleep, so they will fall asleep sooner, get a better night's sleep, and stay in their own beds all night. The important thing is that the routines are pretty much the same each night. You can change up the song or story, for example, but make sure that you sing a song or tell a story each night, if that is your routine.

Morning routines can vary greatly among families, and even from child to child within one family because of differing schedules. A family with both school-aged children and toddlers, for example, might have one routine with the older kids and another with the younger ones who don't wake up until after the older ones are gone to school. A family with a stay-at-home parent will most likely have a different routine than families that have two parents working outside the home. When you do things in the same order each time, it will become habit for your family. Children will know what's expected of them next. It will save time and frustration for the whole family!

Getting ready to go somewhere can be a chaotic experience if expectations are not set ahead of time. Give your kids a time frame to get ready and make sure they do not have to be rushed. That will cause someone to have a meltdown every time! Try this routine... Tell the kids that they have five minutes to finish what they are doing, and then it will be time to get ready to go. When the five minutes is up, announce that you are setting the timer for 30 minutes (timers are a mom's best friend!). Have everything the kids will need set out for them-clothes, socks, shoes and gather anything

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they need to take with them. Give a prize to everyone that gets completely ready before the timer goes off-it could be something as simple as a sticker.

The word "homework" usually evokes feelings of dread for both students and parents. A lot of times, the process of doing homework involves parents yelling at kids to "Get your homework done!", and kids finding anything and everything else they can to do rather than the homework. When they finally do sit down to do it, there is a lot of whining that takes place, and parents are too busy doing other things to sit down with their kids and make sure the homework gets done correctly. Why not turn homework time into a time of bonding with your child through a new family routine?

Here is an example. Have a set time that homework occurs every day. It could be before dinner, after dinner, before bath-whatever works for your family. Try not to make it as soon as they get home from school. They've been in school all day and need a break! Do homework in the same location every day. Make sure it is as free from distractions as possible (not in front of the TV!). A table or desk is best. It gives them room to spread out and work. It also provides a level of comfort because that is the way they are used to working at school. Give kids a five-minute warning that homework time is about to begin (good "timer moment"). Use this time to check out the homework before the kids do. Make sure you have the supplies they will need available before you have the child sit down to begin. It's a good idea to keep a "homework box" that holds common supplies needed for homework. When it's time to begin, have the child(ren) sit down and explain what they are expected to do. As they do the work, make sure you are available to answer questions. When they are done, check over their work and make sure it's complete. Have them put supplies back in the "homework box" and homework in their backpacks, ready to take back to school. The key to a pleasant homework experience is an involved parent!

Family routines at mealtimes provide bonding and communication time. Dinner is a great time to learn a new family routine! As you are cooking, have kids set the table and do other age-appropriate tasks. Once dinner is ready, have everyone sit down together (not in front of the TV!). Use this time to talk to each other about your day. Stay positive-no arguing! After dinner, everyone clears the table together. Depending on the age of your kids, you might even have them load dishes into the dishwasher. Make it work for your family!

Hopefully some of these tips will get your family off to a great start for the school year.
(Source: Lisa Poppe, Nebraska Extension Educator)