Finding the Flexibility of Family by Lauren Leiker, Parent Education Instructor

As adults, we tend to choose one or the other: relentless routine or freeing flexibility. We find great comfort in either knowing exactly how our day will move along, or in knowing that we can choose as we go. The truth is, however, that there is necessity in life for both routine and flexibility and our aim should be to understand where each belongs in our lives.

Furthermore, as parents, we must aim to raise our children to understand the significance of each and the relationship between them. Routines provide great benefit to parents and to children. Also, practicing routines in the family setting is necessary for children to understand the benefit of routine and its place in their lives. They will apply this practice and understanding in adulthood. And, for parents, it is never too late to make positive changes in life! In the end, the true test of a healthy routine lies in the ability to comfortably stray from it on occasion.

Some routines you may have already adopted, or may want to consider:

- Bedtime
- Mealtimes
- Quiet time
- Getting ready in the morning
- After school activities and homework
- Chores
- Family meetings and activities
- Special parent/child time

Routines can be daily, weekly, or monthly. Routines with your 2-year-old will be different than they were when your child was an infant, but still, equally as important. As children get...
older and schedules grow busier, it is necessary to frequently re-evaluate your routines and adapt them to new family schedules. For example, during soccer season, Monday’s afternoon routine might have to be different than Tuesday’s, but every Monday should look and feel the same, if possible. When soccer season ends, you can re-evaluate the routine. Also, if you suddenly find you are not getting out of the house to work and school on time, it is likely time to alter the morning routine to better fit everyone’s needs. Older children can and should be a part of this process.

Benefits of routine for children:

- Children who have normal daily routines are better able to deal with stressful events, such as a new sibling, a divorce, a move, or the illness or death of a loved one.
- Routines teach healthy habits like exercise, washing hands, brushing teeth.
- An organized and predictable family environment contributes to a child’s sense of security.
- Routines teach basic work skills and time management.
- Routines teach the significance of relationships and responsibilities.

Benefits of routine for parents:

- Organization and predictability lowers stress.
- Routines help you complete your daily tasks more efficiently.
- Consistency in routine reduces time spent nagging and “directing” your children.
- Routine leaves time for self care!
- Regular and consistent routines help you to focus on the positive and contribute to your sense of being a well-parenting.

Some routines involve holidays or special time with loved ones. Because these routines tend to carry more value and sentiment than the mundane tasks like brushing teeth or putting away laundry, they are defined more appropriately as rituals. Rituals, too, are an important part of a child’s life because they teach the significance of family history, tradition, and relationships.

Routines provide great benefits to families. Having routine schedules defines the routine expectations and responsibilities parents want to teach their children. Understanding these expectations and responsibilities clarifies the family’s value system. Involving children in re-evaluating the routines as they get older breeds trust and respect and communication. The positive family relationships that are created by consistent and healthy routines allow for flexibility. As children get older, they can be given the flexibility required by adolescence. Families can enjoy a spontaneous outing. A low-stress family environment makes it easier to re-calculate when a day doesn’t go routinely. In the end, the true test of a healthy routine lies in the ability to comfortably stray from it on occasion.
Parent-teacher Jaimee was down by the boat, peering up the hill between the trees. I followed her line of sight to find it ended on her daughter, the youngest child in the class, in the midst of some sort of verbal altercation over the swings. Jaimee was just watching, but I made a beeline for the scene. Her daughter was addressing another 2-year-old in a commanding voice, "Stop! That's Charlotte's swing." She was firm, convinced of the rightness of her cause, "Stop!"

We teach that technique at Woodland Park: to forcefully say, "Stop!" when someone is hurting you or scaring you or taking something from you. We practice it at circle time, usually holding our hands in front of us, palms out, saying together, "Stop!" Although in this case it was something learned second hand, from her older sister, or maybe Jaimee, because we hadn't introduced it in the summer session. Not only that, but she wasn't defending her own swing, which she held by the chain with her tiny fist, but rather the one which her friend had lost when she briefly walked away.

It didn't seem to be working, however, probably because the child to whom she said it had also not yet learnt this tool. As she took a few steps away from her own swing to get closer for better effect, she let go of the chain and another child who had been awaiting a turn snagged it, an unanticipated additional injustice. Tears were next. I wanted to jump in now before the best chance for talking was washed away by them. We can always return to conflicts once the tears subside, but it's never as effective as catching things in the moment.

I asked this group of four 2 and 3-year-olds, "What's happening?"

She said, "They took our swings!" No one else said anything.

I asked, "Did you get out of your swings and they got in?"

She nodded.

"They probably thought you were done swinging." I waited for someone to say something, but when no one filled that space, I asked, "What should we do?"

"They can get out of the swings and we can get in them!"

The other three children were silent, two of them still swinging, but paying attention.

I can't remember exactly how we got there finally – I probably forced things a little – but we agreed on a system of sharing that involved taking turns in twos to the count of 20, those of us standing counting aloud in modified cheerleader fashion while others swung, then they switched and the counting started again.

It was a fairly typical solution to a fairly typical kind of problem. The kind of thing that happens in preschools around the world every day. In a cooperative, however, the parent gets to see it with her own eyes, not through the reports of others.

After awhile, my participation in the sharing game no longer necessary, I returned down the hill to Jaimee. She said, "I was just watching to see what would happen. She's the youngest and the smallest. I wondered if she would stand up for herself."

I said, "She did."

And Jaimee answered, "I know." Knowing: what a great feeling that is.
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January Preschool Fairs

Parent Map’s 2012 Preschool Preview - North Seattle/Shoreline
Date: Tuesday, January 10th
Time: 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Where: Shoreline Community College

MOMS Club of Seattle - NW 2012 Preschool Fair
Date: Saturday, January 21st
Time: 10:00 am - 12:00 pm
Where: The Family Center at St. Alphonsus, 5816 15th Avenue NW

We’ll have a table at both fairs to promote our coops. Please consider volunteering—it’s a great way to get the word out about our wonderful community.

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January 30 - Feb 5, 2012, the UW Book Store will donate 15% of all purchases either in store or online to PAC scholarships

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...please post attached flyer in your schools!

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North Seattle (Tues)
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NSCC (Wed 3-5p)
Olympic
Victory Heights
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Broadview
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3-5’s
Broadview
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Group Code: NSC
The Parent Advisory Council (PAC) of the North Seattle Community College Cooperative Preschools presents a workshop for parents:

Amy Lang, MA

Facts by Five
Why you need to talk to your kids sooner than you think!

- Why you need to start the conversation way earlier than you think
- Sexual abuse prevention tips that won’t scare them (or you!)
- The number one way to keep your kids healthy + safe
- The best way to start the conversations
- Why knowing your sexual values are key to talking to your kids
- Tips for making the talks easy, fun and actually happen!

Thursday, February 9, 2012
7:00-9:00 PM
Faith Lutheran Church
8208 18th Ave. NE, Seattle

This event is free and open to the public.

http://coops.northseattle.edu/