

Back to School During COVID-19

Routines, Schedules, and Rituals



Heading back to school for the upcoming school year—whether virtually, in person, or via a hybrid model—will require some adjustments to existing routines and schedules. Our days are going to continue to look different for a while, so it's important to remain flexible. At the same time, having some predictable structure and rituals goes a long way to support children's emotional well-being. Here are some suggestions to smooth this transition and encourage a back to school mindset:

- ▶ **Work to establish clear daily routines to eliminate daily decision-making and increase efficiency.** Being able to complete the routine without parental prompting gives children a feeling of accomplishment and promotes accountability. For young children who aren't able to read yet, visual routines (with pictures) give a sense of independence. As children get older, visual routines can be replaced with simple check lists until a habit is created.
- ▶ **Talk positively about the upcoming change of routine and going back to school.** Children often adopt the attitudes held by the adults in their lives, so it's important to be a role model of positivity even in times of uncertainty.
- ▶ **Begin your new back-to-school schedule three to five days prior to the first day.** Remember to wake up early enough to incorporate time for everything that needs to get done such as breakfast, packing lunches, gathering belongings, catching the bus or carpool, etc. For preschool and older children, let them know that a transition is coming so it's not a big surprise on the first morning. Talk through any questions they may have. *(See next page for a sample schedule.)*
- ▶ **Maintain beloved rituals.** If you've always taken first day of school photos, continue doing that—even if your child will be learning online. Keep up existing rituals of wearing a new outfit on the first day, loading new school supplies into backpacks—whatever it is, keep it going! Consider adding new rituals or ideas to what you've done in the past. If your children are learning from home, maybe there's now more time for a special first day breakfast, etc.
- ▶ **Start gradually, knowing that the transition to your new schedule might not be perfect.** Talk with your child about what seems to be working well, and where there are opportunities to improve the process.
- ▶ **Maintain your bedtime and sleep schedule.** Children might balk at this, but it's healthy to maintain this normalcy to wind down and cue the brain and body it's time for sleep.

Definitions:

Routines are patterns of actions and expectations and the familiar order of the day. The structuring of time into routines has an enormous impact on how we feel.

Schedules help children begin to anticipate what routines are happening and when. Schedules allow parents to become a partner in routines, rather than continually prompting children to keep moving.

Rituals build meaning and order in our daily lives. Rituals join routine as the bind that holds individuals and groups together in times of stress and uncertainty.



Example Family Schedule

(Learning from home scenario.)

Wake/get ready for day

Breakfast

Discuss/write down plan for day

Periods of school and work rotated with movement

Lunch

Periods of school and work rotated with movement and time outside

End of official school day

Child-selected extracurriculum activity

Relax

Homework

Family time - telephone or video chat with relatives together

Dinner - Discuss the day and make adjustments as needed

Relax/bed



Our Family Schedule

A series of 14 horizontal bars, each with a gradient from dark teal on the left to light blue on the right, intended for writing a family schedule.