

Though your morning may seem hectic and disorganized, there is actually a pattern to what you do. Getting up, getting dressed, and having breakfast are all examples of “daily routines”: things that you and your child do in the exact same way every day. Daily routines can help your child make sense of his world because they are **repetitive** and **predictable**. The more times your child does something the same way, the clearer the meaning of what is happening becomes.

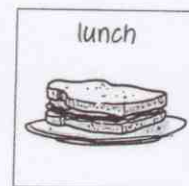
In this chapter, we will look at the ways in which the activities you do every day with your child – your daily routines – can increase his understanding of what you do and say, and how Visual Helpers can contribute to this understanding. We will also see that when you use R.O.C.K., daily routines become much like People Games: structured activities in which both you and your child have opportunities to take turns and interact.

R.O.C.K. in Your Daily Routines

R. Repeat What You Say and Do

Repeat what you say and do when you start the routine

The first step of any routine is to announce it by saying its name and doing something specific associated with it, like showing your child his pajamas before bedtime. If you begin routines with specific names or labels, your child will associate those words with the routine: “Bathtime” for having a bath or “Brush teeth” for brushing his teeth. It is important to be consistent in what you say and do. For example, if you say “Let’s have lunch” one day and “Time to eat” another, your child won’t learn to associate specific words with lunchtime. So, decide what labels you’re going to attach to your routines and stick to those names. Printing the name of the routine on the top of a Picture Schedule may remind you to be consistent. As well, start your routines with the same action every time. For example, if you’re telling your child it’s lunchtime, you can either bring your hand to your mouth as if you were eating or hold up your child’s plate. You may want to sing a special song at the beginning of a routine to help your child understand what is about to happen. There isn’t one right way to start the routine, but once you decide what you’re going to do, don’t change it until your child is ready to learn something new.



If you print the name of the routine next to a picture, you'll be more likely to use the same words every day.

The second step of many routines is for your child to come to you so that you can do the routine together. Some children will come all on their own, while others may not come even after you call, "Come here." To get your child to respond to "Come here," use the Helper's Rule, described in Chapter 1. Call your child's name and say "Come here" once. Then wait. If he doesn't respond, call him again, physically guiding him over to the site of the routine.

In addition to "Come here," daily routines provide ideal opportunities for your child to learn to follow other simple directions in a natural, meaningful way. For example, some routines, like mealtimes, begin when your child sits down at the table, so in these routines your child can get a lot of practice responding to the direction "Sit down."

Repeat what you say and do during the routine

As with People Games, do the actions of the routine in the same way and order each time you do them until your child is very familiar with them. Keep what you say simple and consistent. Remember to "say less and stress, go slow and show." With practice, your child will start to understand how the routine works and will participate in it at his level of ability. Once your child can follow the routine without your help, you can vary it by introducing something new. For example, you can offer your child a choice or do something unexpected.

Repeat what you say and do when you end the routine

Just as your routines need beginnings, they also need clear endings. Always make the "finished" sign, saying "all done" or "finished," and then put the picture of whatever routine or part of the routine you've completed into the "finished" container. You may want to add, "Give me a hug," "Give me a kiss" or "Give me five" (done by slapping your open palm against your child's open palm) as a final step in your routine. In addition, you can develop other rituals to help your child understand that a routine is over. For example, to let your child know that he has heard the last story before bedtime, say, "The End. And now bed." You can sing a specific song or turn out the lights in the hallway before turning out his lights. No matter what you do, make sure you do it the same way each time.



If you end your routines by making the "finished" sign, your child will see that the activity is over.

Repeat the routine often with different people and in different places

It is easy for your child to become dependent on you being there to go through his routines with him. To help your child become more flexible and independent, try to find other people with whom he can do his routines. For example, maybe one day Grandma could have lunch with your child or the babysitter could give him his bath. If you get others involved, show them how to do the routine in the way that is most familiar to your child. They can use a Picture Schedule to keep what they do and say consistent. When your child is ready, let him do some routines without anyone's help.

O. Offer Opportunities For Your Child to Take a Turn

Plan when you will offer your child a turn

The beauty of routines is that they are already broken down into small steps. Each of these steps gives your child an opportunity to take a turn. For example, think of bathtime. First you need to turn on the water to fill the tub. If your child can turn on the water, this can be his first turn.

Next, your child needs to get undressed. He can take off his T-shirt – his second turn. Your child may want a toy to play with in the bath. His third turn can be choosing which toy he wants. Finally, he gets into the tub. When your child is in the bath you both can sing a song together: “This is the way Daddy washes my arm, washes my arm, washes my arm, when I am in the bath!” If you leave out the word “arm” after you sing the beginning of the song, your child can take yet another turn by filling in the blank with a word.



There are lots of things to do and say when getting washed!

Once you decide when you will offer your child a turn, be consistent. In the example above, this means that the next time you bathe your child, offer the turns at the same places – before you turn on the water, before he takes off his T-shirt, before he gets his bath toy and before the word “arm.” Sometimes, you plan when your child should take a certain turn, but he takes a different turn at another time. He may do this because the new turn is more interesting to him or easier for him to do. Whatever the reason, follow his lead and include the new turn in the routine the next time you do it.

Plan what turns your child can take

The turns your child will take depend on his stage of communication and the specific routine. Because your child needs to understand what’s happening before he can do things on his own, many of his first turns will be *actions*, responses to your directions and suggestions. For example, when your child washes his hands, you (or a Picture Schedule) can tell him to turn on the water and take some soap.

However, following directions is not the only kind of turn your child can take. You can balance your directions with opportunities for other kinds of turns, such as making comments or choices. Avoid giving your child too many directions in one routine, and don’t give directions if your child no longer needs them.

Some routines, like mealtimes and bathtimes, are very social. In these routines, there will be more opportunities for your child to ask for things, make choices, fill in blanks, comment on the unexpected and have short conversations.

Offer new opportunities for turns as your child progresses

Naturally, you need to keep up with your child’s progress. Once he has memorized a routine, add something new. For example, if you always give him his juice bit by bit, your child will get an opportunity to request “more,” but nothing else. But, if you surprise him by giving him a drink he doesn’t like, he has a chance to learn to say “no!” No matter what stage your child is at, there are always opportunities for him to learn something new in daily routines.

C Cue Your Child to Take His Turn

Give explicit cues at first and then more natural ones once your child is familiar with the routine

The same guidelines that you use when playing People Games apply to bathtime, mealtime and even greeting a visitor at the door. At first, you need to do all the work, providing models of your child's turns for him or physically guiding him when necessary. Eventually, you do less: pausing and looking expectant may be enough to signal your child's turn.

Use Visual Helpers

Use Picture Schedules to show your child the routines of certain times of the day – for example, what he does in the morning before he goes to daycare – and for routines that your child has difficulty with. In difficult routines, the pictures show your child how the routine is done and will help him get through challenging spots. Visual Helpers can also remind your child what to say during routines. For example, at lunchtime, a Choice Board or a Cue Card with “I want” printed on it can remind your child how to tell you what he wants. And looking at a Picture Schedule of his whole day may make it easier for your child to tell you about what he's done or what he's going to do.

Engineer the situation

Once your child has learned the steps of a routine, you can give him an opportunity to take more turns by engineering the situation. You can put something he needs or wants where he can see it but not reach it or offer food bit by bit. The best way to encourage your child to comment is to introduce something new into familiar routines. The suggestions in Chapter 2, pages 68–81 will help you engineer the situation and make daily routines places where your child can always learn something new.

K Keep It Fun! Keep It Going!

Though routines may be repetitive, they don't have to be boring! For example, most children will love bathtime if there are bubbles and toys in the water and you're singing songs or playing games.

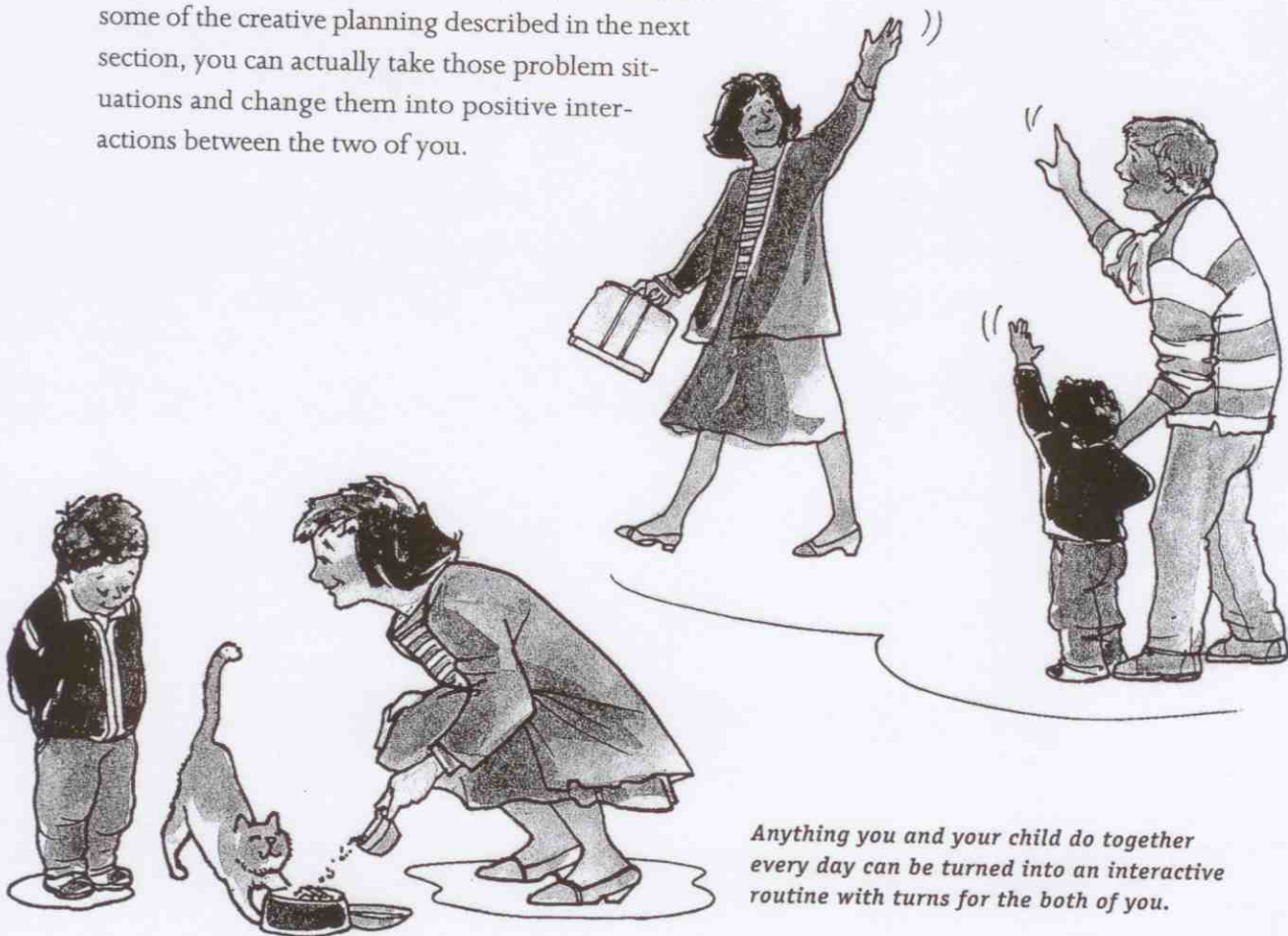


Songs help make routines fun for you and your child.

Adding songs to routines is an easy way to make them more fun. Songs catch your child's attention and have actions that you can do together. In Chapter 9, we will look at how you can make up songs especially for your child. A special song can help your child learn some new actions or words, or help him through a difficult situation. For example, the father in the picture sings a song he has made up for his son to the tune of "London Bridge." The song is simple, with the same five words repeated over and over again – "Brian's pants are coming down" – but it makes potty training a little more fun.

In the same way that you can turn routines into fun activities, you can also turn fun activities into routines! Saying "goodbye" to mommy or daddy every day, greeting a babysitter or teacher, feeding a pet, visiting the doughnut shop or washing dishes can all be turned into enjoyable routines with predictable turns for you and your child.

Some routines can be extra difficult because of your child's sensory likes and dislikes. For example, it's often a challenge to turn mealtime into a fun activity if your child is a picky eater and sensitive to the smells of certain foods. Getting your child dressed may also be a challenge if he is over-sensitive to touch. But even difficult routines can provide an opportunity for your child to communicate directly to you. And, with some of the creative planning described in the next section, you can actually take those problem situations and change them into positive interactions between the two of you.



Anything you and your child do together every day can be turned into an interactive routine with turns for the both of you.