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Your little one thrives on routine. Creating a new game plan is a win for the whole family.

We've all been there. It's morning and it's chaos. You're frantically grabbing the many things your baby needs and cramming them into the diaper bag. When you get where you're going, you discover that you have. no. diapers.

Routines help us all get through predictable to-do's with less stress and (bonus!) less effort. Knowing what's coming next has huge benefits for you—and your baby.

Why are routines helpful? Because routines are comforting for both adults and babies, they can help everyone feel more relaxed. The best news is that routines can keep us grown-ups sane and also help our little ones grow up healthy. Babies have no control over their lives, so routines comfort them and provide a sense of safety. This builds trust and security that will help them explore, grow, and develop.

Routines reassure babies that you will take care of their needs. You can create a routine for any part of the day: leaving the house, lunchtime/naptime, bath time, and bedtime. The routine for bath time might be undressing baby and wrapping them in a towel. You may sing a song as you put them in the tub and apply lotion when you take them out. By the time your baby is six months old, they will probably recognize some routines.

Here's how to get started.

- **Choose a routine that's been tough lately.** For example, maybe bedtime with your toddler has turned into an hour-and-a-half process with too much coaxing and negotiating. By the time the lights are finally out, you are too exhausted to do anything but fall into bed yourself.
- **List all the steps.** Clothes off and into the hamper, then splashing in the bath. Next: PJs on, teeth brushed, story and lullaby, and lights out. Talk through each step with your child as you do it. "Now it's time to brush your teeth." When you get to the last step, tell your child: "We just finished our lullaby. Now it's time to say good night."
- **Create a reminder in pictures.** OK, this is for the crafty folks with some extra time on their hands. Take photos of your child doing each step. Make a bedtime routine chart by pasting the photos in order to show "what comes next" when getting ready for bed.
- **Make your child a part of the routine.** Show your child the steps in the chart and explain them as you do them. You can even ask your child to tell you what's going to happen next.

Remember, new routines don't happen overnight. It takes practice to build a new habit, plus a few tries to see what works best for your child and family. It may feel like a lot of work at first, but with time and experience, you'll find new routines smooth the way for everyone in your family.

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