

## Infants & Toddlers Learning Environments

# The Environment: Schedules and Routines

Responsive and predictable schedules and routines help provide infants and toddlers with a sense of security. This lesson explores ways caregivers can create appropriate schedules and routines to help infants and toddlers feel safe, relaxed, and ready to explore and learn.

## Objectives

- Identify why predictable schedules and routines are important for infants and toddlers.
- Define responsive schedules and routines.
- Learn ways responsive schedules and routines support learning and development.



## Why Are Schedules and Routines Important?

Take a moment to think about your day today. What if you arrived at your place of work and were told, "You'll be starting at a different time today. Your hours today will be 11:45 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. We also need you to help at a different location. We need you to work with a teacher in the infant classroom at another child care center. When you come here tomorrow, you may be helping at a different location again. I will let you know."

How would you feel? How might your feelings affect your ability to find this new location? How will your feelings affect your behavior with the teacher and infants in the other classroom? How does this apply to infants' and toddlers' feelings and behaviors in settings with varying and unpredictable schedules and routines?

Infants and toddlers do not understand the concept of time, so they organize themselves by the people they are with and the events that happen. When things happen in the same order each day, infants and toddlers have a better understanding of their world and feel more secure. A predictable schedule filled with consistent and responsive routines helps them to know what to expect and helps them feel more confident in themselves and the world around them.

## A Daily Schedule for Infants and Toddlers

Infants and toddlers should be viewed as capable and competent. Each is unique in personality, needs, and responsiveness. A daily consistent yet flexible schedule will help maintain routines that are supportive of these qualities. We also think about schedules in terms of how much time is given to different routines. For example, some infants may take several short naps throughout the day, whereas others may take one or two longer naps. For very young children, differences from one child to the next are normal. Children develop best when nurturing teachers modify their schedules to accommodate infants' and toddlers' needs rather than trying to get children to fit a set classroom schedule.

An infant's or toddler's schedule is guided and supported by a responsive primary caregiver based on what is learned through observations and connections with the family. The primary caregiver strives to understand the child's needs and helps each individual transition from one experience to another. You can support autonomy by providing "wait time" for each infant or toddler so that they can process information and make connections (Wurm, 2005).

Caregivers, along with other program staff, help determine what to include in a typical day. When caring for infants and toddlers however, the focus should stay on the sequence of their care and how things happen rather than keeping to a time schedule. Daily schedules often include:

- Experiences: Caregivers should remain close by to offer support to infants and toddlers as they play and explore their environment at their own pace.
- Caregiving routines: Arrival, feeding or eating, diapering or toileting, sleeping, departure, etc.
- Transitions: Times of change that occur in a child's day, such as snack to outdoor play.

Predictable schedules help provide a framework and direction for caregivers when caring for infants and toddlers. In turn, infants and toddlers feel secure when schedules and routines are dependable; this tells them that they can trust caregivers to provide for their needs. Within a consistent daily schedule, caregivers are able to build routines around infants' and toddlers' natural habits.

A daily schedule for an infant and toddler classroom might include:

- Arrival/greet families
- Breakfast/feeding
- Indoor/outdoor developmentally appropriate experiences; naps as needed
- Diapering and toileting
- Small group time with songs
- Lunch/feeding
- Diapering and toileting

- Naps as needed
- Diapering and toileting
- Snack/feeding
- Indoor/outdoor developmentally appropriate experiences
- Departure

When considering your schedule, and particularly diapering or toileting routines, remember infants and toddlers should be checked and changed (or asked to try the toilet) at least once every two hours or more as needed (e.g., at family's request or for temporary diaper rash). In addition, children should always be immediately changed if they have soiled themselves.

6:30-8:15 Welcome/ choice of activities

8:15-8:45 Breakfast

11:45-12:15 Quiet activities

12:15-2:15 Rest time

/ story time

all group activities

### Responsive Routines

Routines are the consistent, predictable, daily experiences of an infant and toddler, such as greetings, diapering, sleeping, and feeding. The ways caregivers create and support routines enable them to help infants and toddlers build trust and independence. Explaining to infants and toddlers what is happening during routines and transitions can help build a sense of predictability and trust. For example, when diapering, a teacher could say, "I'm going to take your pants off now, OK?" Or, when preparing to eat, "First we need to wash our hands, and then

we can have a snack." It is important for teachers to help interpret children's experiences by acknowledging their feelings ("I bet you are hungry, aren't you?"). Using songs to accompany routines can reduce stress during transitions and make these experiences more enjoyable for children and teachers. They can also serve as a cue for children about the upcoming activity, e.g., a "clean up" song before going outside to play. In addition, as we will discuss in the [Positive Guidance course](#), giving children warnings about an upcoming transition can help them feel more in control and prepared for the next part of the day ("In five minutes we will clean up snack. Does anyone else need something to eat?"). As children get older, you can begin to give them more autonomy in making decisions about their schedules. You can say things like, "Would you like your diaper changed now or in two minutes?" or "It is time to go outside. Would you like me to put your hat on you, or would you like to do it?"

Jim Greenman, Anne Stonehouse, and Gigi Schweikert (2007) recommend these ways to enhance caring routines:

- Provide adequate time between your interactions.
- Talk directly to each individual about what you are doing, and speak in a positive tone.
- Acknowledge and compromise your own feelings by putting the individual first.
- Offer opportunities for autonomy, but be available to help.
- Position yourself so that you can monitor others.
- Communicate with parents and respect their culture, diversity, and views.

Time spent in interactions during diapering, feeding, toileting, etc. also encourages children's learning. For example, we can encourage language development during a feeding with an infant by describing foods, tastes, and smells. "Oooh, I smell the peaches. Do you? Don't they smell sweet?" Using pictures that show routines like sleeping or diapering can help older infants and toddlers anticipate what will happen next. Time spent holding and cuddling an infant during feeding builds strong relationships between teachers and children that are the foundation of learning during the infant and toddler years. Demonstrating the steps in a routine (e.g., hand washing), explaining aloud what you are doing, and including pictures that show the steps in the routine are all ways that caregivers can help toddlers become familiar with routines and learn how to complete them more independently.

Infants and toddlers make sense of their worlds when routines meet their needs and are completed in familiar ways. Infants and toddlers with special medical or developmental needs may have requirements that differ from those of the other children, and accommodations are necessary in caregiving routines.

With young infants, the caregiver must be especially responsive, nurturing, and flexible in meeting the child's needs. Over time, routines become more predictable, which allows for similar and consistent interactions. With this predictability, infants and toddlers feel understood and are able to affect the world around them. Over time, infants and toddlers learn that certain actions usually follow others, and they learn to trust their caregivers.

By participating in daily routines, infants and toddlers receive the message that they are capable of doing important things. Participation in enjoyable and meaningful routines helps foster healthy development and security and builds self-confidence. Offer opportunities for self-help. While most toddlers cannot put their coats on completely by themselves, they often enjoy taking part in the process. A toddler might hold his arm out or complete the zipping once you have started it. Encouraging infants and toddlers to take part in routines helps them become more self-sufficient and take pride in their attempts and accomplishments. However, it is important to remember that not all cultures view early independence and participation in routines in the same way. Caregivers can connect with and learn families' ideas about daily routines, as well as about what is most important and valued.

For toddlers, especially those with special needs, pictures that help support their successful engagement in routines can be incredibly helpful. For example, you could display a small series of pictures near the sink to remind children about the necessary hand-washing steps. Or, perhaps near the snack table, there is a small series of pictures that reminds them about the important steps before (e.g., washing hands, gathering napkin) and after (cleaning up space, throwing trash away) having snack. You can find more information on how to support all children in your setting in the References & Resources section of this lesson.





 See

Watch this video and identify how these caregivers support infants and toddlers in their daily routines.



Do

Infants and toddlers learn about their world and the people around them through daily routines. Try the following actions in your learning environment to support responsive schedules and routines for the infants and toddlers in your care:

- Remember that schedules and routines must be flexible to fit individual children's needs. Work with children's families to develop schedules that work best for each child.
- When guiding infants and toddlers through routines, talk and sing songs about what you are doing, and interpret the child's experiences aloud.
- Post pictures or photos of the daily schedule and steps in daily routines at the children's eye level.
- Discuss what will happen next in the schedule: "After we finish the story, it will be rest time."
- Review the sequence of experiences, routines, and transitions with toddlers: "We had breakfast and then we went outside."
- Talk with families regarding their expectations concerning routines. Some families may look for their mobile infants and toddlers to cooperate more readily in various routines, while others will expect independence in some routines.



Explore

Think more about routines and daily care of infants and toddlers. Use the *Responsive Routines* handout and look for ways to highlight your strengths and to continue supporting infant and toddler development and learning. Discuss your observations with a trainer, coach, or administrator.



### Responsive Routines

Focus on improvements as you record observations about classroom routines



*Required: Complete and review this document with your trainer, supervisor, or administrator*



Apply

Pictures can be used with infants and toddlers to help them learn language and make sense of the world around them. The *Visual Cue Photos* attachment can be used to support infants and toddlers during daily routines. The picture cues can act as daily routine or schedule reminders and can be used to craft a visual schedule. Or take

pictures of routines in your own classroom to make the visual cues more reflective of your community.



### Visual Cue Photos for Schedules

Visual reminders connect infants and toddlers to important routines in their daily schedule

## GLOSSARY

### **Accommodation:**

The act of providing what is needed, including adapting or expanding experiences or materials to accommodate a child's individual needs

### **Primary Caregiver:**

The adult who takes responsibility for meeting the care and educational needs of a specific group of children within the larger group for most of each day

### **Routines:**

Consistent, predictable daily events an infant or toddler experiences during a day, such as diapering, feeding, and sleeping



## Demonstrate

**Q1** True or false? As an infant and toddler caregiver, it is important to stick to a set clock time and schedule throughout the day. \*

- True
- False

- Q2** Which of the following is typically not included in a daily schedule for an infant and toddler classroom? \*
- Breakfast or feeding
  - Diapering and toileting
  - Sleeping or resting as needed
  - Twenty-minute circle time
- Q3** A parent considering your program for their infant visits your classroom and asks about your schedule and daily routines. What do you tell them? \*
- "We feed our infants and put them down for a nap on a set schedule each day."
  - "Our daily schedule includes a small group time that lasts about 15 minutes."
  - "We build our schedules and routines around infants' natural habits. We believe children develop best when teachers modify the schedule to meet infant and toddler needs."
  - "We really do not have any routines or schedules in place for our infants or toddlers. Infants and toddlers are too young to benefit from routines or schedules."

## References & Resources

- Dodge, D., Rudick, S., & Berke, K. (2015). *The creative curriculum for infants, toddlers, and twos* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Teaching Strategies, Inc.
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- Gonzalez-Mena, J. (2002). *Infant/toddler caregiving: A guide to routines* (2nd ed.). California Dept. of Education.
- Greenman, J., Stonehouse, A., & Schweikert, G. (2008). *Prime times: A handbook for excellence in infant and toddler programs* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Redleaf Press.
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