

Understanding Your Toddler:

Tips for Making or Changing Routines



What is a routine?

- A routine is an activity with steps that are done in the same order over and over.
- A routine is **not** a schedule. The order of the steps is what is important, not the time of day.

Toddlers memorize routines and create scripts in their minds.

- Your toddler makes scripts in his mind based on the routines in his life. His scripts are like movie scripts. One scene follows the next. He uses these scripts to predict what will happen.
- Knowing what will happen next helps him feel safe and secure. When things do not happen the way he expects, he may get frustrated or upset.
- Sometimes, he may memorize activities that you did not plan to be routines.

You are in charge of your toddler's scripts!

- You can use routines to help your toddler be calm and cooperative.
- You can choose the steps that work best for you and your family.
- When you follow a routine, your toddler will create a script in his mind.
- Routines work for many daily activities. For example, mealtime, diaper changes, and bedtime.

Making a new routine is easy!

1. Choose a few steps for your routine. Keep it simple!
2. Do the same steps in the same order each time. It is important to be consistent.
3. Be patient! It will take time for your toddler to memorize the steps and create his new script.

Here is an example of a routine for starting at a new daycare.

1. Walk to the car while singing a favorite song.
2. Put him in the car seat and drive to the daycare.
3. After arriving, take him out of the car. Hold hands while walking in together.
4. Hug and say a fun rhyming phrase before you walk out of the daycare.

As he goes through these same steps over and over, he will create a script. He will learn that these steps end with him staying at the daycare. Knowing what to expect may be all he needs to be calm as you are leaving.



Changing a routine.

To change an existing routine:

1. Change the first step. The first step needs to be **very** different.
2. Make changes to all of the remaining steps; change order, add or remove steps.
3. Follow the new routine consistently and be patient.

Here is an example:

Changing from a bottle to a cup can be frustrating. Toddlers often get upset when they expect a bottle but get a cup instead. A new routine can help.

Before you begin, you may want to move his high chair to a different place. You can also store the cups in a different place than the bottles.



Old Routine

1. Get out the bottle and set it on the counter.
2. Get the milk out and put it in the bottle near the refrigerator.
3. Pick him up and take both the bottle and your toddler to the sofa.
4. Hold him and feed him the bottle.

New Routine

1. Put him in his high chair. Talk to him about his cup.
2. Get the cup out and set it on the counter, away from the refrigerator.
3. Get the milk out and walk it over to the cup. Pour the milk in the cup.
4. Bring the cup to his high chair and talk to him while he drinks.



After he sees the new routine several times, he will no longer expect the bottle. He will be more likely to take the cup without getting upset.