



Routine

What are the experts saying?



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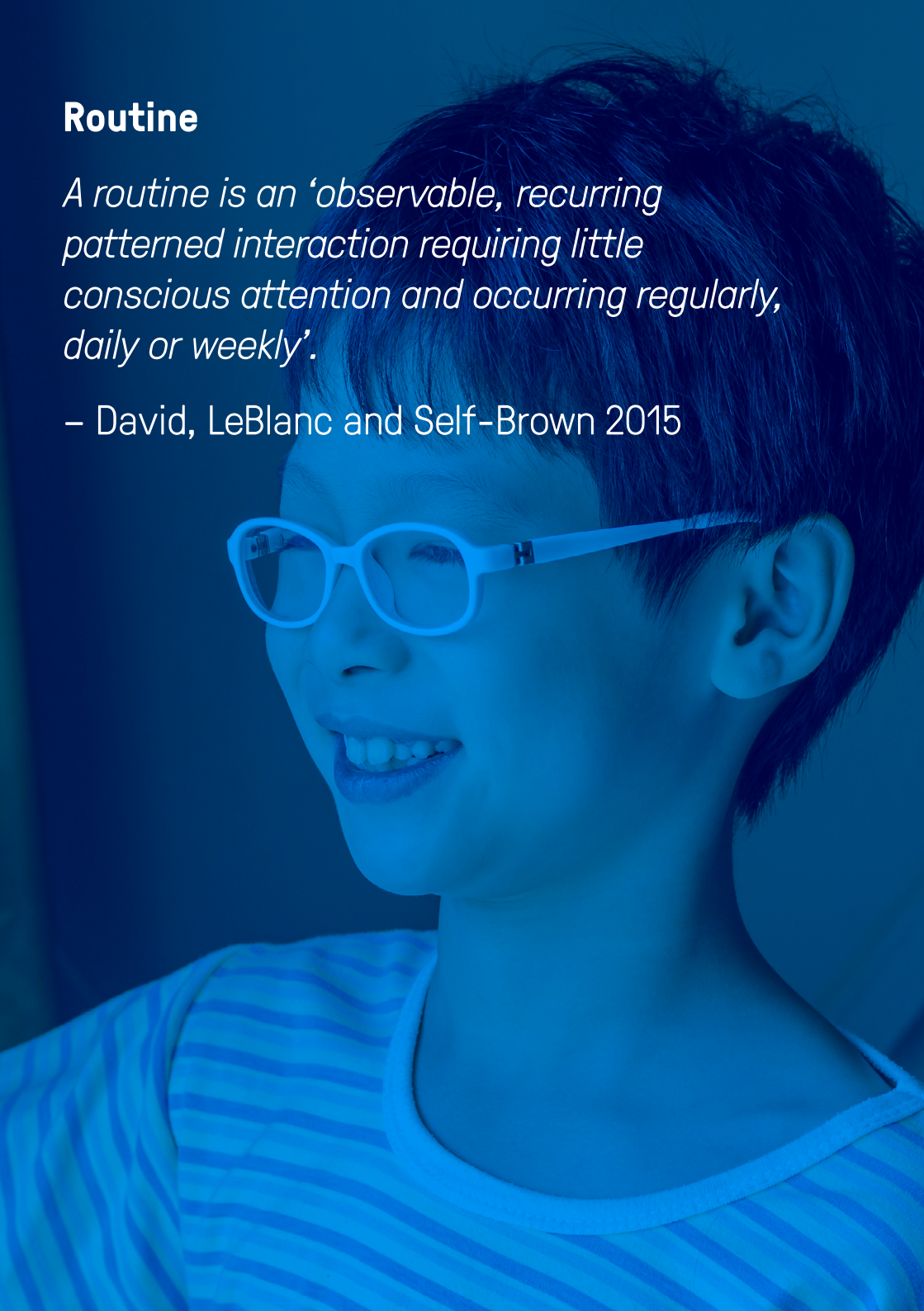
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Position Papers

Routine

A routine is an ‘observable, recurring patterned interaction requiring little conscious attention and occurring regularly, daily or weekly’.

– David, LeBlanc and Self-Brown 2015



According to Todd Warner, an expert in learning and leadership development, routines are ‘moments that matter’, including:

- patterns of regular and social events that define and enable performance, and
- learning and leadership applied.

It is not surprising, then, that one of the most important things we can teach our boys (that just might lead them down a path to future success) is routine.

In a family context, routines have five dimensions:

- discipline
- daily living
- activities and positive attention
- educational and social
- religious and hygiene (Wittig et al. 2007).

Here, we are talking generally about educational routines in the context of school-aged boys.

Why develop a routine?

Stable routines for children are associated with:

- positive self-esteem and optimism
- appropriate social skills
- reduced problem behaviours
- school readiness
- academic achievement (David et al. 2015).

How to develop a routine

As much as we would like to think that our daily actions result from consideration and self-control, most are products of our unconscious habits. We are, after all, creatures of habit. And the same can be said of our boys. Instilling good habits early on will set them up with the tools they need later in life to get ahead.

Stanford psychologist B J Fogg argues that to change behaviour, there are only three things we can do:

1. Have an epiphany
2. Change our environment
3. Take small steps.

It's often the third option that we focus on at school. We know that connecting our goals to disciplined actions (through routines) is a powerful way to improve learning.

So, what does discipline look like for our boys? What are some of the fundamental routines that we teach them to build discipline? Some of the many ways the boys build routines include: lining up to be 'ready to learn', packing their school bags the night before and taking care of their uniform (shoes, shirt tucked in).

We also know that the satisfaction of learning (the 'thrill') needs to be accompanied by motivation (the 'will'). We do this by teaching routines that insist on practice and repetition, and reinforcing this until the skill has been mastered.

What are the experts saying?

- If you make your bed every morning, you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. By the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed. (US Navy Admiral William McRaven 2017)
- In *The Power of Habit*, author Charles Duhigg calls daily bed-making a 'keystone habit', something that kick-starts a chain of other good decisions throughout the day and gives you a sense of 'taking charge'. (Duhigg 2012)
- Daniel Pink, international bestselling author of *Drive*, tells us that the keys to motivation are: purpose, mastery and autonomy (the last of which is correlated with choice). Similarly, self-determination theory teaches us that our boys are driven by relatedness, competency and, again, autonomy. Having the ability to choose is vital.
- In their paper 'Family routines and rituals', Spagnola and Fiese argue that naturally occurring routines and meaningful rituals provide both a predictable structure that guides behaviour and an emotional climate that supports early development.
- According to Stanford psychologist and researcher B J Fogg, who has studied behaviour change for more than 20 years, doing something you don't enjoy and subsequently failing to make it habitual is more detrimental to a mission for change than doing nothing at all. To create

a lifelong habit, the focus should be on training your brain to succeed at making small adjustments, and gaining confidence from that success. To do this, we need to design behaviour changes that are both easy to accomplish and that can be seamlessly slipped into our existing routine. Automaticity is key.

- Psychologist and parenting expert Carl E. Pickhardt ('Adolescence and the development of habits') states that many teenagers fail to understand the law of formative effect: that is, how we become accustomed to acting in the present is how we are likely to act in the future. Practice can make permanent because by repeating ways of acting, a young person forms habits for good and for ill. Good habits provide efficient routines, systems for organisation, and self-disciplines that allow the young person to lead a life that works well for them.
- Everyday routines are shown to serve multiple purposes: as a practical structure to support the running of the household, and as a supportive foundation for well-being, with natural and applied variations within the parameters of family life. (Koome et al. 2012)
- The website of Northwestern Medicine infers that people are creatures of habit, and routines offer a way to promote health and wellness through structure and organisation. Having a routine can greatly improve your health. They stated that many people who don't have any type of routine suffer from stress, poor sleep, poor eating, poor physical condition and ineffective use of time.



Next steps

Good routines can help your son to feel grounded and secure, as well as help him to plan his time more effectively to better manage the demands of school, friends, work, play and study. There are many ways for your son to get into a routine but the number one rule is to make it work for him.

Here are some of the other things that you can do at home to help your son build routine and discipline:

- Give your son responsibility for a particular area of the household.
- Let him develop the routine (without your supervision) of making his bed and opening the blinds each morning (as well as keeping his room tidy!). William McRaven talks about the value of making one's own bed in this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgZLzbd-zT4>.
- Help your son clarify his goals, then talk about the behaviours and actions needed to realise the goal.
- Put those behaviours and actions (along with timelines) on the fridge. Make them fairly short-term so they can be reviewed or changed.
- Link some of the behaviours to things he also enjoys (for example, if the goal is to do a little more study, maybe sit down and join him – with some food!).
- Make sure your son is getting enough sleep (research shows time and again that when are tired, we lose our willpower).

Remember that the earlier you begin to introduce order and routine into your son's life, the easier it will be. When you demonstrate effective routines yourself, you teach your son how to arrange his time in a manner that is efficient, productive and cuts down on stress. This sense of order will also allow him to internalise an automatic sense of how to organise his own life as he continues to mature.

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