

The Benefits of Routine

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In the situation we find ourselves in with COVID-19 changing rapidly, it is an ideal time to look at the routines you can establish at home to help your son feel less anxious in times of unpredictability.

Setting up a routine benefits your child's mental health and wellbeing, but yours too. Importantly, a routine helps *decrease anxiety* and *increase comfort*. This is essential for any child, regardless of age.

Many schools are now looking to introduce distance learning for students, to help contain the spread of COVID-19. With the move to remote learning, a routine will help to set your son up for success at home and can help to maintain family peace.

Here are some tips on how to structure your day in these uncertain times.

Stick with a daily routine

Have a wake-up time and a bedtime, and (where possible) stick with these, especially on the weekdays. Have meal times around the same time every day. Not only does this give boundaries to the daily routine, but having a set wake up time and bedtime can have great benefits for the quality of your sleep.

Be realistic

Make a list of the things that your family usually does during the week. Then work out what you can sensibly keep as part of the daily routine, what can be modified and what can be 'let go' for now. When working on the weekly schedule, make time for the things you often look forward to, such as movie nights, Taco Tuesday, scrabble night, scheduling Friday or Saturday night to watching the AFL games together.

Set a work-from-home routine

Consider chunking work time into small regular sessions (e.g. 30 minutes and then a break), or a large session during the day and free family time afterward. How this works can be a family decision, but once you have scheduled in work time *stick with the plan, as this is now part of the routine*.

Exercise daily

Build exercise time into your day. This could be at the start, middle or end of your day – or you could have several bite size exercise times during the day.

Set time for play

Play is an essential part of any boy's day, regardless of age. For Junior School boys, we recommend *at least 2–3 hours* of free playtime per day. For Secondary School boys, they should have at least 2 hours of free playtime (separate to screen time).

Free play time could include games, creative play, kicking the footy, listening to music, having a chat, calling a friend, visiting neighbours, or walking to the café for a milkshake.

Get outdoors

Make time to be outside. You should be outside in nature for a minimum of 1-2 hours per day. Again, more is better. This could mean just hanging out in your backyard, or going for a walk.

Manage screen time

Inevitably, your family will be using screens, particularly for work and schoolwork. As a family, it is ultimately up to you to decide how long you use screens. By including outside time and play time/free time throughout the day, this will help to minimise unnecessary screen time.

For teenagers, free time could include use of their phones. We would recommend you allow this, but with some parameters. For example, your son's phone and laptop should not be in their rooms at bedtime. They should leave them with you, and get them back at breakfast time.

Make alone time

It is important to have time each day where you are not on top of each other. We recommend that you plan sometime in the day where you each have your own alone time.

Make time for fun

Make time for magic moments together. Although the current situation can be stressful, this is also an opportunity to spend more time together and create some special memories.

This could be as simple as sharing stories your kids haven't heard before, building something together, pitching a tent in the backyard, painting a mural on your garden fence or toasting marshmallows.... the only limit here is your imagination!

Be kind to yourself

Relax your standards for housekeeping. This will likely mean accepting that there will be more mess and noise around the house, or more screen time, and privileges, or making a simple dinner with less clean up. This is all okay.

These are all suggestions and can be changed to suit your family. The key with routine is simply just to stick with it. This does not mean following it precisely to the minute – flexibility is everything. However, on a day when you all need to be more relaxed, try at least to stick with the order.

You can also read more about the importance and power of routines in this Crowther Centre [position paper](#).