

## Schedule of the Day AT HOME

Many families have approached us with questions around family schedules. Families have different configurations, needs, and resources, but one thing they have in common is the desire to have happy and productive days at home. We agree that creating a schedule is a place to start.

### HOW TO CREATE A SCHEDULE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Begin by inviting your child to help create a schedule. If you already have one, there is no need to start over, but it might be time to revisit and refine your schedule. Have a “meeting” with your child about the schedule. At Open House, “meeting” has a specific meaning, and your child has had a lot of practice with them. They know that information is shared and discussed at meetings and that meetings have rules. They know they are expected to listen and that when it is their turn to speak, their ideas will be heard and respected. Bring them into the process. Share how a schedule helps everyone have smooth and happy days. Children are more likely to follow routines and schedules when they understand the goal and have had input.

As adults, our lives are organized around time. We have calendars, clocks, and executive function. We have spent many years training ourselves to use time to plan and be productive. Young children are just beginning this journey. They live in the present. Although long color-coded daily schedules may be a goal, it is best to start simple. Just as a long *To Do* list can make us feel overwhelmed, seeing a long schedule can overwhelm children, unless we take it step by step. Before young children can adapt to a schedule, they need a working understanding of *before and after* expressed as *First - Then*. For example, your schedule can put an unfavored activity *First* (brush teeth) and a favored activity *Then* (play with Legos). Keeping it this simple gives

you and your child dozens of chances throughout the day to be successful. It will also give your child just as many opportunities to test you.

Limit testing is not an indication of parental failure, nor that a child is taking the wrong fork in the road. Limit testing is a sign of healthy development. Follow this [link](#) for more on this topic. Your job is to stay calm and hold firm. Your children are smart and will learn that their time and energy is wasted on pushing against a firm limit. Besides, despite some evidence to the contrary, your child does want to please you.

#### WHAT GOES IN THE SCHEDULE

Set a time for a daily review, and make it a mostly positive one.

Unsurprisingly, children enjoy being praised. Adults often underutilize this valuable tool. Be sincere in your praise and direct it towards the specific behavior. You love your child because they are your child, but you praise them for putting away their toys or completing a puzzle. Remember *you catch more flies with honey than vinegar*. Your praise and attention is the honey.

Time for yourself and other responsibilities also need to be part of the schedule. Many of you are working from home and need solid blocks of time. These are the times for a child's favored activities. Remind your child that even though you are home, it is still a work day for you. Set clear expectations: *While I am in my Zoom meeting I need you to play quietly with the play dough. First my Zoom meeting; Then we build with magna-tiles*. Create a visual to reinforce when you are not available (a traditional stop sign works well). Keep the distinction between the workweek and the week-end. If you rely on screen time to get your work done, take a break on

the week-end and play board games or cook together instead. Don't be too hard on yourself. This situation is neither one you invited, nor deserve.

On work days, continue to build in breaks for yourself and times to reconnect with your child: e.g., *First* my phone call *Then* we read a book. Your phone call may have been 45 mins and the book may take 5 mins, but you demonstrated you can be trusted to follow the *First-Then* schedule. Also keep in mind you don't have to always "do" things, just being in the same place can make your child happy. They may just need to hear you say "cool" as they build with Legos.

## SCHEDULES AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

As adults we use our inner voice to keep us focused and to problem solve. Young children are just developing this inner voice. Remember it was not so long ago they were pre-verbal, sensory driven beings. It will be their inner voice that helps them problem solve and become independent. At Open House, we refer to this inner voice as "your brain." Encourage your child to talk in their brain. Ask them what their brain is saying and share with them what your brain is saying. Think out loud as you complete tasks to model and encourage your child to use their brain in this same way.

Pretend Play is a way of talking to yourself. As your children develop their inner conversation, their independent play will become longer and filled with purpose. Talking to yourself is how we become readers, writers, doers, and dreamers.

A schedule is a supportive structure for getting things done, communicating expectations, organizing resources, and for finding flow and balance in the day. Your schedule might be large and colorful and pinned on the wall or

might be a small book covered with stickers. You might use a clothes pin or paper clip to indicate where you are in the day. To ease power struggles refer to the schedule as the decision maker for when it is screen, bath, dinner, or bed time. Express empathy if your child protests, but follow the schedule. Take everything one step at time. Remember that the highest purpose of a schedule is for children to have time to play.