

The Importance of Routines

Promoting the wellbeing of looked-after children & young people and previously looked-after children & young people

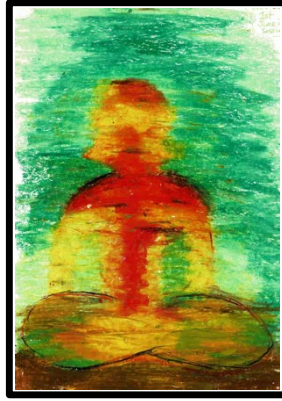
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4 S's of Attachment Poster by Jo Potter (Artist & Teacher)

Contents Page

Content	Pages
Welcome & Introduction	3
Growing Up with Unpredictability	4
The Importance of Routines	5 - 7
Goals of Routines	8 - 9
Benefits of Routines	10 -13
Building Routines	14
When to Create New Routines	15
Developing Routines	16 - 17
Designing New Routines	18 - 19
Ages and Stages of Development	20 - 24



Welcome & Introduction

Welcome to this information booklet that aims to provide you with details regarding the importance of routines when 'being with' and sharing the lives of looked-after children & young people and previously looked-after children & young people.

The purpose of the information is to support you in:

- understanding why routines are important
- developing and maintaining routines at this unprecedented time of Covid-19

In addition, the information is aiming to provide some hopefully helpful and useful tips and ideas that you will be able to use to maintain your wellbeing; the wellbeing of children, young people & families.

Other resources are available and are provided by The Staffordshire Virtual School.

I hope you find this resource helpful and supportive.

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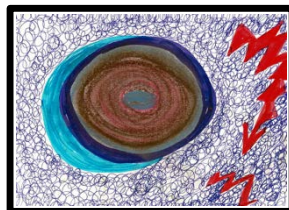
Growing Up with Unpredictability

Many children & young people who have faced adverse life experiences and / or trauma have almost certainly experienced unpredictability, chaos and loss of control in their lives. This unpredictability can impact on the child or young person at times of change and uncertainty due to an increased or heightened sense of danger.

Routines are traditionally generated and organised through the attachment system when primary caregivers structure a baby's life with regular feeds, sleep patterns, interaction, play and creativity; all of which builds predictability and rhythm. As the baby develops and grows they begin to internalise these patterns of structure, which enables a sense of predictability and safety to happen. The growing child learns to 'trust' and 'generally' has a sense that the world is safe and reliable. If a child has had 'good-enough' predictable and safe experiences housing routine and structure; when a routine is changed or different they will 'typically' have resources to cope because they have experienced the world as being safe.

If a child grows with chaos, unpredictability and fear, structure and routine will be something new and potentially threatening; which may trigger the stress response system into fight, flight or freeze. These survival responses may become more pronounced at bedtimes, mealtimes, or other transition points since such times may have been instants of vulnerability or stress.

In order to feel safe, children & young people may have developed some seemingly robust ways of trying to cope, to gain self-control and / or to control situations that are perceived as dangerous. Building routines and predictability onto their lives is therefore important to soften any powerful triggers associated with change, transition or unpredictability.



The Importance of Routines

Developing and maintaining consistent, predictable routines can often support children & young people to feel secure and develop a sense of security and safety. Looked-after children & young people and previously looked-after children & young people in particular need to have routines established because a daily routine can offer predictability and coherence over time, leading to an increased sense of feeling secure and safe.

Routines give children & young people a sense of security and control over their environment. A predictable, well organised, structured and consistent routine at home, enables children & young people to feel safe, secure and looked after. This is more so, especially during unusual or stressful times and during different or difficult stages of development.

Predictable routines help families spend time together, organise themselves, know who does what, when, how, and in what order offering structure. The predictability gives children & young people a sense of security that enables trust to develop.

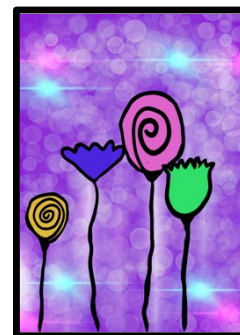


Developing routines increases safety in the relationship and in the environment because the child or young person begins to trust what will happen with no energy needed for survival.

Flexibility

Aim for consistency and build in flexibility.

Establishing and maintaining daily or weekly routines offer a wealth of benefits; however, it is important to remain flexible. It is vital to stay sensitive and adaptable to the needs of each child, young person, adult and the situation.



Spontaneity and creativity are important factors in a child or young person's life. For example, if part of the washing the dishes within the breakfast routine becomes disrupted because there is a phone call, then maybe it is fine to take the call and pause with the washing up. Such small changes need to be planned for by you as the 'responsible adult'. They need to be addressed at the time they occur.

It is equally important to be aware of routines and schedules that can seem or become too regimented or strict. A schedule is a plan for carrying out a process or procedure, showing dates or times when they occur.

If the routines are too strict or regimented with no flexibility at all, then the benefits of the routine or structure will be reduced. Children & young people may feel controlled by the routine rather than feeling that they have any control or autonomy. This is particularly so for looked-after children & young people and previously looked-after children & young people due to potential lived experiences where they have absorbed unpredictability and chaos.

Change may be needed at unusual or stressful times and adaptations may be needed in unexpected or difficult circumstances. It is important to build in awareness of the potential for adjustment to a routine and in developing the skills of children and young people to be able to cope with any change of routine needed. This will enable a child or young person to adapt easier and quicker if a difference is needed.

Family life can be smoother with few consistent and predictable routines. It is about getting a balance with the child, young person and family, which is why I advocate and strongly recommend a Family Centred as well as Person Centred Approach. For more information about Imagine Inclusion's Family-Centred and Child & Young-Person-Centred Approaches see the website.

Rituals

Routines allow families to show what is important to them and can give a sense of unity and belonging with a sense of 'this is what we do collectively', rather than the I statement of, 'this is what I do'.

An important source of unity in families and for providing an added sense of predictability and coherence over time are rituals. Rituals can also be referred to as habits, schedules, traditions etc. Rituals are repeated and practiced traditions and celebrations such as the way the family greet each other, sing a particular song together or celebrate a birthday.

Rituals are typically specific to each family and can be passed down from generation to generation. They add a sense of security, identity and belonging, a shared connection, a connecting thread as they have special and significant meaning. Shared memories can be created, which build family bonds and relationships

A word of warning is that some rituals may have been very abusive, destructive and threatening for looked-after children & young people and previously looked-after children & young people. This means you will have been thoughtful and cautious about language and be curious about triggers that may be unseen.

Be aware of the routines and rituals that you as a family may take for granted and how these might impact on the wellbeing or sense of self of looked-after children & young people and previously looked-after children & young people.

Examples of Routines

Daily

Morning routine, mealtimes, cleanliness and self-care, play & creativity, school / college work, homework, household tasks, family time, together time, bedtime.

Weekly

Playing, washing, cleaning, playing, visiting people and places, hobbies, certain meals on certain days.

Other routines

Visit to other family members and siblings, holidays, extended family / friend gatherings and celebrations, dentist, therapist or social worker meetings, PEP's, etc.

Goals of Routines



Establishing a routine is about promoting the wellbeing of looked-after children & young people and previously looked-after children & young people by establishing predictability by supporting regulation of experience and in developing a felt sense of safety.

A Balanced View

A balance between structure and flexibility is necessary.

Use attunement skills to observe the interactions and intersection between routine, structure and the functioning of the child or young person over time.

If enforcing a structure or routine consistently increases the child or young person's distress or arousal consider moving the routine or adapting it.

If as a caregiver there is too much flexibility that leads to increased controlling strategies by the child or young person, consider increasing the structure.

Tuning In to Changes

As a child or young person develops with age, maturity and as a felt sense of safety increases or decreases; tune in to changes and what might need to be different. A child or young person may need **more** or **less** co-regulation and soothing; or may need more time and strategies to develop and use their own self-soothing or affect regulation strategies.

Child and Young Person Centred

Every child & young person is unique and will have had differing lived experiences that will have impacted upon them in differing way.

It is important to be thoughtful of 'stage of development not age of development' of the young person, so that routines and schedules hold personal experience and stages of development in mind.

Considering how routines can be utilised and what exceptions may be needed. For example, one child or young person may need 10 minutes of 'relaxation' after completing school or college work, whilst another may need 20 minutes of 'relaxation'. Build personalisation into the routines and be flexible.

Involvement and Participation

Research shows that the more involved and the more a child or young person participates in what is going on in their life the more autonomy they have. This gives a sense of control. This sense of control gives power, meaning and increases motivation and a positive sense of self.

- Think of ways to involve the child or young person in developing and incorporating routines into their life.
- Consider the needs, desires, preferences, opinions, abilities, strengths of the child or young person alongside the actualities of the home setting and other family members.
- Consider the age and stage of development.
- Consider the support a young person may need or want and how this can be balanced in a sensitive way.

A range of child and person-centred resources can be provided to support you in developing this approach at www.ImagineInclusion.co.uk.



Benefits of Routines

Safety & Belonging

An organised and predictable home environment will help children & young people to feel safe, secure and looked after, particularly in stressful times or during difficult stages of development.

Patterned interactions give a sense of regularity and predictability which reinforces family identity and enhances a sense of belonging.

Bonding and Togetherness

When a child or young person knows what to expect and notices regular family activities, they can begin to understand what is important to the family and to them. This can give a sense of bonding and strengthen connections with shared values, shared beliefs and shared interests.

The child or young person might notice that watching a certain TV programme together on Saturday mornings is important, highlighting that family time together is special. A family bonds and unites by doing regular, important and shared activities together.

Developing routines that can be built around having fun or spending time together can strengthen family relationships. For example, reading a story together before bed or having a special drink of hot chocolate after a few hours of School or College work can become a special time for you and the child or young person to share together.

Skill Development

Having specific tasks to do in family routines can help children & young people to develop a sense of responsibility and fairness. Skills that can be developed are time-management, responsibility and growing independence.

Some task will also develop specific skills such as laying a table for breakfast will develop skills that can be used for a career in hospitality.

Develops Confidence, Responsibility & Independence

A sense of responsibility and independence grows as children & young people complete aspects of a routine with less help or supervision from adults. For example; as a child or young person learns how to clean their teeth or dress alone they will begin to take pride in knowing they are learning to do it by themselves.

Confidence will grow as a child or young person does not have to be told how or when to do a specific aspect of a routine such as dressing. This can lead to a sense of feeling empowered and supports independence.

Body Clock and Rhythm

Daily routines help the rhythm of a person's body clock to work, which can support good eating and sleeping habits. For example, bedtime routines help young people to develop good routines and habits so as they reach adolescence and the 'body clock' start to change they will already have a natural diurnal rhythm.

Affect regulation

Structuring a daily schedule can be supportive in enabling looked-after children & young people and previously looked-after children & young people to understand and manage arousal and energy levels. This can be done by building in specific activities to either expand energy or to decrease energy. Limiting highly arousing activities at bedtimes and increasing calming activities at bedtimes can be a way of managing affect regulation.

Establishes Healthy Habits

Modelling and teaching healthy habits such as brushing teeth, getting exercise, washing hands regularly especially after using the toilet can support children & young people to take part in healthy habits via learning through observation and modelling.

Healthy habits such as regular handwashing might make it less likely for a young person to get colds and other illnesses.

Other daily grooming and health habits such as cleaning teeth twice daily, regular exercise and time for learning tasks help establish constructive habits. Children and young people who practice these skills will be better able to manage their time. As they grow, develop and mature they will have more

self-discipline in terms of healthy grooming and eating habits, along with studying and cleaning their rooms.

A consistent routine includes and supports:

- Regular healthy meal-times
- Regular bowel movements
- Calm relaxed times during the day
- Regular bedtime

Routines can reduce stress, and lower stress is good for children's immune systems.

Establishes Expectations

Developing routines and schedules about tidying up or having a bath or shower at the beginning or end of every day makes these healthy habits become part of a natural way of being. A child or young person **expects** to complete these activities, thus becomes accustomed to knowing these routines and is therefore more likely to follow them. This decreases the likelihood of a 'power struggle' about taking part in the routine as the child or young person becomes accustomed to knowing when to do these activities and how to do them. Expectations are therefore established.

Creates a Calmer Environment

A calmer environment is created as the child, young person and other family members, get to know what is to be expected; due to the increased predictability this eventually reduces stress and anxiety. The child or young person knows what will happen next, will feel more secure and thus become more trusting in the environment and within relationships.

If children & young people are included in developing routines they will feel valued and included, which may help increase feelings of control and autonomy and reduce feelings of being controlled. This will create a calmer environment.

Creating 'pause' and 'slow movement between activities' can also ensure relaxation and quiet is built into the day.

Memory and Learning

Regular and daily activities can support the development of memory as the repetition supports cognitive functioning if the same routine is followed every day. This can be helpful if regular events are happening or if medication has to be taken.

Visual resources such as calendars can also support the development of memory as a child or young person can visually see what they have to, which can create a visual and cognitive image to enhance memory traces.

Hope and Optimism

If a favourable and enjoyable event is planned for the future, it can offer an opportunity to get excited about what's ahead. Learning to anticipate and manage thoughts and feelings about future events can be something that can be helpful in the long term for looked-after children & young people and previously looked-after children & young people.

Opportunity for individual connection

Building in individual and special moments of time with a child or young person can increase a sense of personal value, connection and aid the development of bonding.

Offers stability during times of change or stress

Once established, maintaining a 'normal' daily routine can make it easier for children & young people to deal with stressful events, like new children or young people in the household; a separation; the illness or sadly the death of a family member, friend or sibling; or restricted changes in life due to health or global emergencies such as Covid-19.

Transition and changes in placements will make it more difficult to maintain a normal routine for looked-after children & young people or previously looked-after children & young people. Please see related guidance for managing change and transition provided by the Staffordshire Virtual School.

Building Routines

Routines help to plan and complete daily tasks and free up time for other activities.

Regular and consistent routines can help adults, parent and carers to feel like they are doing a good job.

Routines can help with organisation and planning, which helps people have a sense of control in busy periods of time. This sense of control lowers stress responses and impacts on positive mental health with increased coping and manageability.

Routines can be helpful in solving disputes and enable decision making. For example, if one night a week is for eating take-out food, that is a night when no-one needs to argue about what's for dinner.

Good Routines

A good family routine is Family Centred. This means it is based on individual family needs, interests and preferences.

All families are different, and what works well for one family might not work for another. Therefore, there are no rules about how many or what kind of routines families need to have. Some people will say that not having a lot of routines is best.

Effective routines have these key elements:

- **Well planned & Understood:** A good routine is one where everyone understands their specific contribution and role. Individuals need to know what they need to do and perceive their role and contribution as being fair.
- **Regularity for Rhythm:** A good routine becomes part of everyday family life. The regularity of daily and weekly events and activities can support a sense of rhythm.
- **Predictable & Reliable:** A good routine is predictable and reliable as things are in the same order and happen at the same time. For example, breakfast utensils are washed straight away so that there are clean utensils for lunch or snacks.
- **Built in Flexibility that can adapt to Change**

When to Create New Routines

New routines might be needed as children & young people develop and grow or when changes are compulsory such as Covid-19 regulations. In such situations and circumstances routines can be revised, adapted or new ones created to take these changes into account.

Be thoughtful about how much of the day is planned and developed into a routine or schedule as it is easy to over-schedule family life. While routines have lots of benefits, it is equally important for good wellbeing that children, young people & parents / carers have free time to play, relax, be creative with others and alone. Please see Promoting and Supporting Mental Health information.

Routines can also be particularly beneficial when you are trying to develop new family habits. These habits can include increased hand hygiene, bedtime routines or sleep patterns.

Routines can help with house care tasks such as washing up, practising instruments or doing school or college work.

New routines might be needed or wanted if a family feel they are not spending enough quality time together, if a family are becoming disconnected or if there is a known or unknown change in the family situation.

Consider adapting old routines rather than establishing completely new routines.

Ideas for family routines

- Preparing and eating meals together
- Spending time together like having a film night
- Having meetings together, or taking turns to talk about the day
- Spending special one-to-one time with each other
- Speaking to friends and other family members on a joint phone call
- Taking part in specific celebration events

Developing Routines

Factors to consider and think about when developing a new routine

Shared involvement

It is good to start by talking about new routines with other adults in the home before talking about them with children & young people. This means that you can mutually agree and understand what your reasons and goals are for a new or adapted routine.

Age and stage of development will be important to think about and consider when talking about new or changing routines. It is advised to design new routines with children & young people to support increased autonomy, choice and control.

Shared goals

Every person in the household and family will have different views, opinions, demands and priorities. Routines need to meet the everyday demands of different household members. Routines also need to meet long-term goals and preferences of the household and family members.

Changes & Growth

Changes and growth are part of life. It is important to have routines that can be adapted because events, people and situations can and do change. For example, as children & young people grow they may be more able to take on more responsibility for self-care such as getting washed and dressed.

In order, to introduce new routines the changes can become part of an old routine.

Strengths & Preferences

Successful routines often build on family strengths. Consider building in specific strengths and preferences into a family routine. For example, if one person is better at getting up early, they could have the first turn in the bathroom.

Fun & Laughter

Having fun and sharing laughter are important features to build into a routine as natural endorphins are released to promote good wellbeing. If a child or young person likes to paint or draw, make sure there are planned times to do these that are scheduled into a daily or weekly routine.

Fairness & Inclusion

A sense of fairness and justice is key for promoting the wellbeing of looked-after children & young people and previously looked-after children & young people. They may have had many experiences of injustice, exclusion and been very powerless. Such experiences can make justice and fairness very important.

Routines work well if there is a sense of fairness and if everyone is perceived as doing their fair share. This fairness needs to reflect and include age and ability rather than everyone doing the same amount.

Reminders

Establishing a new routine or making changes to existing routines can take time for people to get used to and to remember. All family members might need to be reminded about the routines and might need time to practise.

Reminders can be helpful if the reminders are done in a kind and thoughtful way. Objects that might be helpful to develop reminders are phone alarms, a signal provided by the end of a particular television or radio show, post-it note, social stories or visual calendars.

Some children or young people might want to make a 'picture story book' presenting the family routine. This could be an activity that you do together. Social stories are also good for learning and remembering a sequence or routine.

Celebration & Gratitude

Celebrating and noticing efforts of success and cooperation can help the routine pathway to grow favourably. Naming what you notice and being descriptive with praise is advised. For example, saying something like, "I noticed that you got up without me asking today." Speak with sincerity and be genuine.

Showing gratitude by saying 'thank you' and saying what you are grateful for can also be extremely motivating and supports a sense of wellbeing. Small acts of kindness go a long way.

Patience and time are needed to develop routines and for older habits to be overcome. Making small changes in routines can be more productive and welcoming rather than introducing or starting new big changes.

Designing New Routines

These steps can help when you are designing a new routine.

Create a Shared Goal

- A goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a person or a group of people envision, plan and commit to achieve. People endeavour to reach goals within a set time by setting targets.
- Targets are planned, immediate smaller steps that are set to reach the Goal. Targets are often time limited.

Decide which area of the routine you want to focus on and create a shared goal with family members.

Part of the routine you may want to work on as a family is to eat one meal a day together. This would then become the shared goal.

Planning and Preparation

To plan what you are wanting to do you have to think about it before you begin so you are prepared for any unexpected events and have thought about any barriers.

Organise the Goal into individual steps in the order that they need to happen. These steps become the targets.

Consider the following:

- Work out the timing of the routine.
- How much time each step may take.
- The time will you need to start the part of the routine you wish to establish, so you can get everything done and allow time for unexpected events.

Goal Analysis

Consider doing a goal analysis which means thinking about component skills (smaller sub-parts) of the goal to ensure the child or young person will be able to do the tasks involved.

Break the goal into smaller tasks that are ordered (see Planning and Preparation).

Zone of Development and Skill

Think about which steps you can teach the child or young person in order to help them move towards independence in the routine. Be aware of the stage of development and the needs of the child or young person. Affect regulation might need to be built into the goal and routine with co-regulation from adults.

Set for Success

Set for Success means it is important that everyone knows what they are aiming for and expected to do so that success is achieved.

Sometimes support is needed in a 'low key fashion' such as being thoughtful about any possible distractions that might hinder the routine. For example; part of a family eating together routine might be setting the table, a distraction might be the television being on. A way of preventing the television being a barrier at this time might be to incorporating turning the television off into the routine; or building in doing something interesting before the table is set.

Guidance and Boundaries

Make guidance and boundaries so they are easy to follow and adhere to.

Consistency is key.

Creating Connecting

Ensure time for connecting with each other is part of the routine being established. For example, if you are planning to have a family meal allow an extra 20 – 30 minutes so there will be time to have connecting conversations and time to share stories and events.



Ages and Stages of Development

I reiterate that when working with and being with looked-after children & young people and previously looked-after children & young people they are almost certainly to have experienced adverse life experiences and / or trauma. This means that aspects of their development may be younger than their developmental years. In each of these four age ranges, ensuring 'responsible adults and carers' are 'child & young person centred' is essential. This means planning for and being with each child & young person individually rather than focusing on the actual age.



A focus needs to be on the STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT. For example, a teenager in years may need a focus and routine developed using Early Years and Infancy ideas.

The age ranges in this document are my own and are approximations for the purpose of this document.

Early Childhood and Infancy (0-7 years)

In early childhood and infancy children & young people are almost completely reliant on adults for structure and routine development. Repetition is key for learning routines and for developing internal rhythms.

This is a time when adults have to be patient with children & young people as they are consistently asked to repeat a story or to repetitively play a certain game. The child or young person is learning about and developing trust.

Attention and concentration may be minimal, which means that activities or new routines need to be built using small amount of time. Start with a short amount of time, say 3-4 minutes and gently build up to a longer duration.

Some children may like to or may need to learn a new routine using a social story. This social story can be developed with an adult or taken from resources available. Carol Grey has some wonderful social stories.

Daily or weekly routines are often easier to follow if they are visual. Visual Time Daily Time-Tables and Visual Daily Plans can be very helpful for children and young people. Some children like to make their own with adults. This could be a shared activity.

As children are growing and developing it is helpful to encourage independence by supporting self-care routine development such as 'hair-brushing, teeth cleaning etc. Adult monitoring and involvement will be needed and withdrawn in sensitive and appropriate ways for independence and autonomy.

Ideas for routines

- Getting up and getting washed and dressed in the morning
- Time to play with adults and other children and young people following social distancing guidelines.
- Learning to enjoy time alone and developing activities to complete alone such as colouring, drawing etc.
- Eating meals together.
- Developing together time each day.
- Reading books or telling stories.
- Having quiet time.
- Bedtime.



Middle Childhood (8- 12 years)

The middle childhood years are years when children & young people are becoming more independent and will almost certainly be accessing an education setting for learning. Accessing an education establishment may be different for looked-after children & young people and previously looked-after children & young people due to changes in family situation leading to possible differing education establishments.



There is typically an increase in demands on time as children & young people become more interested in friendships and want to be with other children & young people in different ways (such as online). An increase in a personal daily schedule might make it harder to establish and follow family routines due to the voluminous competing demands.

Children & young people will be generally be more able and possibly more willing to support the development of family routines, which will give increased autonomy and control. Expectation, guidance and boundaries remains important in this developmental age as children & young people may want more control.

Ideas for routines

- Getting up and getting ready in the morning with less help
- Time to be with adults and other children & young people following social distancing guidelines.
- Learning to enjoy time alone and developing activities to complete alone such as colouring, drawing, meditation, reading etc.
- Eating meals together.
- Tidying up and doing some household tasks, such as setting the table, washing up, caring for a pet.
- Doing after-school activities such as video conference chat.
- Taking part in weekly events such as sport, hobby or club.
- Giving out pocket money at a regular time and day
- Bedtime.

Adolescent and Teenage Years (13 – 19 years)



Adolescence and teenage years are typically in a stage of development when family routines become increasingly challenging to the young person.

This is a time of development when young people want to spend more time with peers and outside the home rather than spending time with family members and being in the home. More independence and increased flexibility are needed. Supporting young people to develop and create routines outside the home is important to give them greater autonomy and increased independence.

There may be fewer family routines; however, it is important to have some routines to ensure there continues to be regular contact and communication.

Involve the young person in establishing and developing the routines more.

Develop new ways of communicating such as leaving notes, sending text messages.

Monitor the young person's behaviour and know where they are as it is important to keep them safe, even if this is at a distance.

Flexibility and adaptability are essential for routines as the young person gets older. For example, bedtime routines may be different.

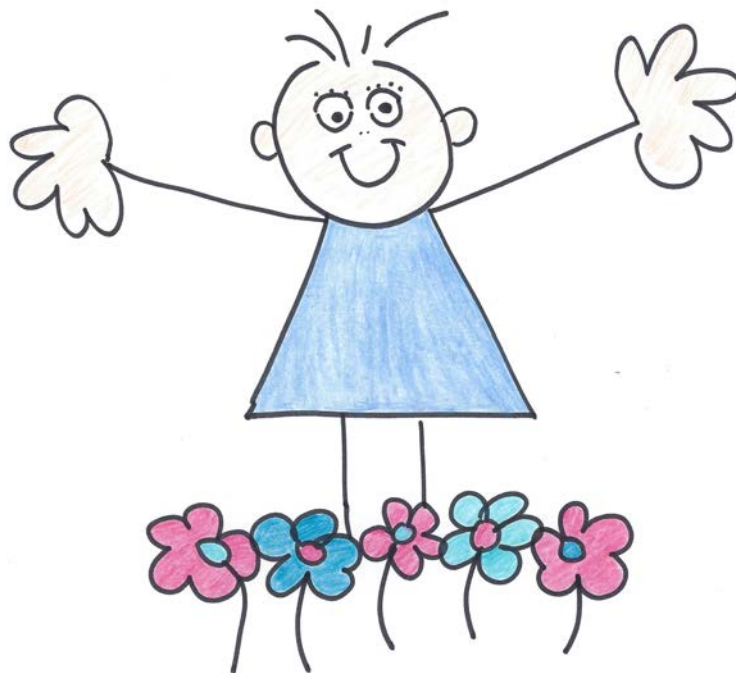
Ideas for routines

- Doing more household activities such as personal laundry, making beds and cleaning rooms.
- Completing set homework and revision.
- Taking part in after-school activities, this will include hobbies or sport.

Young Adults (20 – 25 years)

Young adulthood is a time when young adults are typically living independent lives. Routines continue to be important because they give connection and a sense of belonging.

Consider how you can support the young adult to maintain some family routines and support them to develop their own routines.



Thank you for reading

Go Well