

RULES, RITUALS AND ROUTINES



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Learning Seed Catalog and ISBN Numbers

Catalog: LS-1303-07

VHS ISBN: 1-55740-837-8

DVD ISBN: 1-55740-836-X

Closed Captioning

This program is closed-captioned.

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Summary

Parents must plan their course of action if they are to successfully manage their children's behavior. *Rules, Rituals and Routines (RRR)* gives parents the information they need to create a successful "road map".

Rules

Rules should be based on a family's values. There should be fewer rules rather than more, and they should be directly tied to these family values. When parents are enforcing these rules, they should tell the children why it is important not to hit others, for example, by relating this action back to the values of love and caring. These connections illustrate to their children why they expect these behaviors and why they will enforce them. After rules have been established, clear and consistent enforcement is essential.

Routines

A routine is defined as something that is done at the same time in the same way every day (or on any regular schedule). Routines are considered the 'silver bullet' in managing behaviors in children. Children need predictability in their lives. It is the parent's responsibility to provide structure and predictability in the home and in the child's life. Bedtimes, mealtimes and predictable schedules provide this predictability to children. In addition, it provides parents with the structure necessary to effectively enforce the values-based rules they have established.

Rituals

Rituals are routines with meaning, and they connect family members together. Family meals every night, bedtime routines, and birthday celebrations are all examples of rituals. Rituals are opportunities for families to get close and love each other. These rituals have several benefits. Some studies have shown that the more rituals a family has, the fewer behavior problems there are among the children. Rituals such as family meals are linked to higher academic achievement. Family rituals have also been shown to increase childhood resiliency.

Overview

Scene #1: Rules

Key words and ideas:

rules
values
family mission statement
setting limits
consistency
firmness
time-outs

Rules provide the foundation for all good behavior management. They consist of a set of expectations that are consistently reinforced in the home. In the *Rules, Rituals and Routines (RRR)* framework, the rules come from the family values that parents feel are important.

Articulating the **values** a family holds can be difficult. Take the time to think deeply about these values and then write a **family mission statement** reflecting them. A guide to writing a family mission statement is provided in the *Interactive Materials* section of this handbook.

In the first scene, the three rules expressed are: (1) Be Kind, (2) Be Truthful, and (3) Show Respect. The mother values the concepts of being kind to others, being truthful and showing respect, and the rules and expectations she has for her children reflect this. As she **sets limits** and administers punishments she helps her children make the connection to their values-based rules. Such connections have been shown to help children incorporate these values into their daily behavior.

This is much more effective than simply setting a limit or punishing the child without explanation when s/he does something wrong. The moment the mother takes to link the value to the behavior pays off handsomely in the long run. It allows the child to see that Mom is not just being “bossy”. She has reasons for her expectations, and through understanding those reasons the child learns why certain behaviors are expected, and certain behaviors are not acceptable.

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Follow the Sequence

Follow these steps to effective and meaningful behavior management:

1. Think Ahead:

- Think about the values you wish to give your children.
- Establish rules and expectations and let the children know what these expectations are.

2. Be There:

- Be present, supervising the children in your care. Even older children need supervision, for their own safety.
- Always check in and watch what is going on. It is a parent or caretaker's job to know what his or her children are doing at all times.
- **Children from birth to four years** of age need constant supervision. This means *never* leaving them alone. Always be within earshot and in visual contact.
- **Children between four and eight years** of age need intermittent supervision. For example, in the first scene, Mom is focusing on talking with Derek, but at the same time she listens to what the children are doing and saying.
- **Children older than eight years** will need less adult supervision as they demonstrate increasing responsibility and independence. When these older children begin to prove they can be safely left alone, you can begin decreasing the amount of direct adult supervision.
- Be careful, and use your own common sense when determining if and for how long the children in your care should be left unsupervised. Know that even the most independent, well-behaved child should not be left alone for more than an hour or two, for safety's sake.

3. Set Limits:

- One of the reasons parents need to constantly 'be there' is to **set limits**.
- For example, in the first scene Christian becomes upset and pushes the game board at his sister, spilling game pieces all over the table. Mom sees this and reacts by going to the child, bending so she can speak with him on his eye level, and setting the limit by asking, "Is that how we show anger?" She reminds him that the answer is no, because "we use our words in this family." Finally, she gives Christian a **time-out**.
- **A good rule of thumb for time-outs** is one minute for every year of age; .i.e., for an eight-year-old child, a time-out should last eight minutes. However, time-outs only begin to be effective around age four. Children younger than four are not yet old enough to understand their purpose and to benefit from them.
- Follow a process which is clear and comprehensible to your child:
 - identify the undesirable behavior
 - links it to the value and the rule
 - administer an appropriate punishment

Be clear and concise. Don't talk too much, and don't yell. Instead, be firm in telling the child what you expect and how s/he erred. A time-out can emphasize the lesson.

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4. Be Consistent!

- To effectively manage and, in time, change behaviors, a parent must enforce the family's rules consistently.
 - Parents must address an inappropriate behavior every time their child exhibits it – and it must be dealt with the same way every time.
 - Link behaviors and corrections to the family's values-based rules.

This can get tiring, and sometimes parents may fear they're becoming too bossy or repetitious. But this consistent response sends a very important message to children. It tells them that their parents are present and paying attention, and that good behavior is important. By patiently and persistently enforcing the family rules, parents are letting their children know they mean business and they will be vigilant. Parents are predictable. Life is predictable. This sense of constancy and stability is a one of the best gifts parents can give to their children.

By following this sequence:

- thinking ahead,
- being there,
- setting limits, and
- being consistent,

in time you will see your children develop the inner controls they need to manage their behaviors themselves.

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Scene #2: Routines

Key words and ideas:

routines
predictability
consistency
practice
habit
rigidity

The program offers two examples to illustrate the ways in which routines can affect the happiness and behavior of not only the children, but also the parents. **Routines** are formed by doing the same thing in the same way at the same time every day.

Routines make life **predictable** and they allow families to go through their day in an orderly fashion. Unpredictable structures in the home have been linked to misbehavior in children.ⁱ Chaos and randomness in a family send the message to the children that life is unpredictable and out of their direct control, whereas a consistent routine tells children that life is controllable, that life is predictable. This predictability has been linked to appropriate behavior in children.ⁱⁱ

In the first sequence in this scene, the mother has no routines. She is uncoordinated, rushed and stressed. This stress is felt by the children, who are accordingly uncooperative and upset. In the second sequence, there's a world of difference. The mother has established simple, efficient morning routines. In preparation for the day, she picks out clothes for the children the night before to save time in the morning. She gets up a little earlier to get herself ready. She establishes and enforces a set routine for waking up, getting dressed, using the bathroom, eating breakfast and leaving for work and school.

By instituting routines and consistently adhering to them, predictability takes the place of chaos, and the family experiences fewer problems with bad behavior as they go about their day. Everyone is not only calmer, but also happier.

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Follow the Sequence

See the routine planning sheet and examples of planned routines in the Interactive Materials section.

1. Identify times of the day which require routines:

- Typically, morning and bedtime are crucial times for routines.
- Anytime the family is working together to complete a task is a good time for a routine.
- Meals, chores and homework all go more smoothly when routines have been established.

2. Think about the goals:

- Once you've decided when and where a routine is needed, begin to think about the desired goals of the activity in question.
- What steps should be followed to successfully complete the task at hand?

3. Write down the steps:

- Write down the tasks you need or wish to complete.
- Next, write down all the steps involved in completing those tasks.
- Decide who ought to do which steps in each task, and assign those steps appropriately.
- Share the routine and the roles with the whole family.

4. Implement the Plan:

- Just do it!
- When it's time to tackle a task for which a routine has been established, use that routine faithfully. Make adjustments as needed, but *stick with the routine*.
- Studies show that **once a routine has been in use for 40 days, it becomes a habit**.
- Be patient. Don't give up. Children will fight their parents on the establishment of routines; that's to be expected. Don't let them win.
- **Remember:** the parent is the boss! The parent knows that routines are beneficial. Just do it!

Begin with one routine and build up. It's a good idea to start with something small, like a mealtime routine, and once that's well-established, slowly begin to structure the rest of the day. Step by step, routine by routine, the family's day will become more predictable and the children's behavior will steadily improve as they grow to know what's expected of them and when, and lose their fears and uncertainties.

A word about rigidity: rigidity can perhaps best be defined as being "too routinized". Allowing children no free time or self-determination can be more damaging to them than a life with no routines at all.

Structure things just enough to establish order. How much is 'just enough'? When setting up routines, allow for individual differences in the completion of the tasks.

For example; if you have established a morning-time routine, set up broad expectations for each child. S/he must change clothes, brush his or her teeth, and eat breakfast. But parents can (and should, if practical) allow each child to do it in the order and the manner he or she wishes. Only step in to take control if a task is not getting done; otherwise, let the children themselves figure out how to best structure their day within the framework of these guidelines.

ⁱKnestrict, 2003. For further information please consult the bibliography contained at the end of this guide.

ⁱⁱKnestrict, 2003.

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Scene #3: Rituals

Key words and ideas:

rituals
predictability
consistency
bonding
love
attachment
resiliency
unconditional love

Rituals are routines with meaning. In other words, they are in place not to get a task done, but to bring people closer together. They are the routines that families create and consistently participate in which create connections between the family members. They might include, for example:

- birthday celebrations
- family game nights
- meals together
- walks
- family reunions
- story time at night
- prayers before bed
- simply playing games with children

There is a link between family rituals and family closeness. The closer the family, the less likely children are to misbehave.ⁱⁱⁱ

Rituals are similar to routines because they provide children with **predictability**. Rituals also provide children with living examples of caring adult behavior. What children see adults do, they are more likely to do themselves.^{iv} If children see adults behaving in a loving and kind way during these family rituals, they are more likely to be this way themselves. Several examples of family rituals are shown in this program.

Rituals are like deposits in a bank account. Over time, small daily deposits accumulate. Before you know it, you have a pretty big balance. In the case of rituals, the balance is paid in **love** among and **attachment** to each other. Rituals produce a child that knows that s/he is loved. This type of knowledge creates what researchers call resiliency.

Resiliency is the ability to be secure enough within oneself to withstand traumas in one's life. The **bonding** that occurs in families helps to facilitate resiliency in both the children themselves and the family as a whole.^v

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Follow the Sequence

1. Choose one ritual:

- Choose a small ritual. For example, eat one meal together each week.
- During this meal each person can have a chance to tell the family about their day. Smaller children might be asked questions about their day to get them to start talking.
- Remember, children may resist this at first, but demand participation.
- Keep with it for several weeks. Rituals can be something as big as a family meal or as small as a hug and a kiss every night. It is the **consistency** that counts. Over time something as simple as a good-night kiss, when done every night for years, becomes a very powerful ritual, one that a child will remember forever,

2. Choose another ritual:

(you can find several examples of family rituals with descriptions in the Interactive Materials section)

- Take, for example, a bedtime ritual. Bedtime rituals are very easy to establish.
- Have a bedtime routine. Brush teeth, wash face, take a bath or have a bedtime snack.
- When the child is in bed, read a book or two, or talk about the day they've had and the day to come.
- Kiss them good night and say "I love you".

3. Add rituals at will:

- Continue to add rituals. There is no reason to limit the family to any certain number of rituals.

Rituals give families time to share feelings, and to let children know they're loved unconditionally. Nurture them. Touch them and allow them to do the same. These are the times that form bonds between family members that will last a lifetime.

So remember the three R's!

Values-based **rules**, family **rituals** and consistent, well-planned **routines** will help your children learn to manage their own behavior – so you won't have to!

ⁱⁱⁱKnestrict, 2003.

^{iv}Bandura, 1991.

^vWerner, 1999.

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Questions for discussion

1. Explain three routines you will put into practice when you go home, and why they are important for your family.
2. Explain what rituals you would like to implement with your family.
3. Explain what your family rules are and why you chose them.
4. Give three reasons why rules should be linked to your family's values.
5. Discuss the benefits your family will gain by participating in family rituals together.
6. Read your family mission statement.
7. Explain why predictability is important for children and families.
8. Explain why rules must be consistently enforced.
9. Explain why your rules and their enforcement must be discussed with your children.
10. Share the most important thing you have learned from this program and discussion.

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Activity #1: Forming Your Family Mission Statement

"Your actions are your only possessions." - Lao Tse

Thinking about your values is an important first step in learning to teach your children new and acceptable behaviors. If you are not sure of your own values, you cannot be sure you are giving your children a consistent message. Below is a form that will help you think about what your values are and what you would like to teach your children. Answer the questions and then follow the directions to write a mission statement, which can then be used to form your family rules. Have fun!

1. List two traits you admire about yourself and would like to pass on to your children.

a.

b.

2. Name the two most important people in your life, either living or dead.

a.

b.

1. List one word to describe each of these people.

a.

b.

2. Describe yourself in one word.

3. List two rules everyone should follow.

a.

b.

4. Use two words to describe the traits you want your child to possess.

a.

b.

5. What one behavior will you demand from your child?

Activity #1: Forming Your Family Mission Statement (pg. 2)

Take your answers and plug them in to the following paragraph. As your mission statement, it will help you form your family rules.

My Mission Statement

I believe that _____ and _____ are the two most important traits in a person.

I want to be like, and I want my children to be like, _____ and _____ because they are _____ and _____, and I think those traits are very valuable in a person.

I am _____, and I value that in myself.

I believe that it is important for everyone to _____ and _____.

I want my child to display the traits of _____ and _____, and will demand that my children show _____.

Activity #2: Forming Your Family Rules

Based on the mission statement you've just written, write a set of family rules you wish to live by. While you should establish as many (or few) rules as you think necessary, it's a good rule of thumb to have no more than five. The more rules you have, the more difficult it can become for you and your children to remember them, and it is also harder to enforce them all. These should be broad rules that cover general behavior, not specific incidents.

I want my children to:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

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Activity #3: Setting Limits and Being Firm

Now that you have your family rules, it's time to practice enforcing them. Take a look at the following scenarios.

Scenario #1: You see your 6-year-old push another child in anger.

Scenario #2: Your 5-year-old throws some food across the dinner table.

Scenario #3: Your 10-year-old refuses to stop playing and come inside when asked.

Scenario #4: Your 7-year-old uses inappropriate language.

Scenario #5: Your 4-year-old will not stay in bed when it's time to sleep.

In small groups of 2 – 4 people, assign roles and have the “parents” practice setting limits for the “children”. The participants playing children should allow the parents to ‘win’ during the role play. These role plays will help you learn to set limits for your children. Consequences administered to the misbehaving “children” could include time-outs, removal of privileges, or sending the children to their rooms.

For the purposes of this role play, we will assume that the child in question is four years or older. Use the following steps as a guide for setting limits:

Step One: Stop the behavior and ask the child what rule they have broken.

Step Two: Identify the rule and tell the child what the desired behavior is.

Step Three: Administer the consequence. Don't talk anymore. Don't argue. Don't allow the child to argue or discuss the point with you. Direct him or her, and count five seconds. When the five seconds have elapsed and the child continues the inappropriate behavior, administer an appropriate consequence.

Step Four: Ask the child why s/he was disciplined, and ask the child what s/he ought to do differently next time to show proper behavior and avoid this consequence.

Practice setting limits several times in each of these scenarios. The group should discuss and critique each others' performances, and offer suggestions on more effective ways to set limits and administer consequences.

Activity #4: Planning Your Family Rituals

In small groups of 2 – 4 people, brainstorm ideas for family rituals and write them down. When you go home tonight, show the list to your family and share what you've learned. As a family, work together to choose a ritual everyone likes and will be happy to participate in for a long, long time together – and then do it, whatever 'it' is!

Ideas for family rituals:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.
- 15.
- 16.
- 17.
- 18.
- 19.
- 20.
- 21.
- 22.
- 23,
- 24,
- 25,

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Worksheet #1: Review of Rules, Rituals and Routines

Complete this worksheet after viewing the program. It will create a set of guided notes for further study and discussion.

Two of the most important things parents can provide for their children are _____ and _____. Children need predictability, to know that rules don't change everyday. They need _____ to know that no matter what their behavior is, their parents will always love them. You can provide predictability and attachment in your children's lives by giving them three tools: _____, _____ and _____.

A family's rules work best when they are based on the family's _____. Parents should let children know _____ we want them to act in appropriate ways. These rules will be different in each family, but once you have decided on the rules for your family they must be consistently _____ and frequently _____. Through this process, children learn the reasons for the rules.

_____ are the silver bullet of behavior management. Routines provide _____ and structure to home. Through use of routines, parents communicate to children that the world is a _____ place and that their parents are trustworthy and in control. The more predictability there is in the home, the fewer _____ problems children will have.

_____ are routines with meaning. Family rituals create time for families to _____ and attach. They are consistent 'family times' that communicate warmth and love, and build connections between family members. Family rituals such as eating meals together and bedtime routines have been linked to higher academic achievement and higher reading scores in children.

Word Bank

predictability

attachment

rules

routines

rituals

routines

values

behavior

why

enforced

discussed

bond

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Pre-Test

Fill in the blank

1. _____ should be linked to family values.
2. _____ is when a child knows exactly what to expect.
3. _____ is when the child knows that no matter what the parent will be there.
4. Rules should be frequently _____.
5. Rules should be consistently _____.
6. _____ are routines with meaning.
7. Rituals are important in families because they allow time for families to _____.
8. _____ provide much needed structure in homes and families.
9. _____ are also linked to higher academic achievement.
10. Values-based rules allow children to learn the _____ for expected behavior.

True or False

1. _____ Rules should be values-based.
2. _____ Rules do not need to be consistently enforced.
3. _____ Rules do not need to be discussed with children.
4. _____ Routines are only necessary in some families.
5. _____ Routines are defined as doing the same thing in the same way at the same time.
6. _____ Routines are not always good because they teach children that the world is a predictable place, when it really isn't.
7. _____ Rituals are routines with meaning.
8. _____ Rituals like eating meals together have been linked to higher academic achievement and higher reading scores.
9. _____ Routines like bedtime routines can become family rituals.
10. _____ It is essential that parents establish rules, rituals and routines when raising children.

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Test

Multiple Choice

Choose the best answer:

1. It is important for parents to think about their family values prior to raising children because:
 - a) then they don't have to explain to their children why they have rules.
 - b) research says it is important.
 - c) parents then understand their own values and can teach their children why they expect certain behaviors that are consistent with those values.
 - d) they want to.

2. It is important to enforce rules consistently because:
 - a) otherwise children can do whatever they want.
 - b) the video said so.
 - c) that is what my parents did.
 - d) children learn that their parents are predictable, and every time the rule is broken, the same consequence will be delivered.

3. Parents should always discuss rules and consequences with children so that:
 - a) children learn that parents are the boss.
 - b) children realize that they are bad.
 - c) children know they should follow the rules so they don't get punished.
 - d) children know why they have been disciplined, what they have done wrong, and understand how to make the right choice next time.

4. Routines are important in families because they communicate:
 - a) predictability to children.
 - b) authority to children.
 - c) consistency to children.
 - d) both a and b.

- 5) Children raised in families using rituals have been shown to be:
 - a) higher achievers in school.
 - b) better readers.
 - c) more securely attached to their parents.
 - d) all of the above.

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Links

Family Resource: Character Development <http://www.familyresource.com/parenting/character-development>

Mothering: Growing Child http://www.mothering.com/articles/growing_child/growing_child_main.html

TKC: Dr. Thomas Knestrict and Consultants <http://www.rulesritualsroutines.com/pages/11/index.htm>

Appendix A
Answer Keys

Worksheet #1 Answer Key

Words in order of use

Predictability
Attachment
Attachment
Rules
Rituals
Routines
Values
Why
Enforced
Discussed
Routines
Predictability
Predictable
Behavior
Rituals
Bond

Pre-Test Answer Key

Fill in the blank

1. rules
2. predictability
3. attachment
4. discussed
5. enforced
6. rituals
7. bond
8. routines
9. rituals
10. reasons

True or false

1. T
2. F
3. F
4. F
5. T
6. F
7. T
8. T
9. T
10. T

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Test Answer Key

1. C
2. D
3. D
4. D
5. D

Appendix B

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