Resource 3.

Using a Daily Schedule and Routines

What does your daily schedule look like?

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Welcome

What will you find in this document?

In this resource, you will find simple guidelines and basic recommendations **for setting up a schedule and routines for the children** in your program. You also will find examples of how to design schedules that the children in your program can follow.

Why is this information important?

It is important to use and follow a consistent daily schedule with routines because most children benefit from having routine and predictable schedules.

Guided Reflection Templates and Example

These templates will help you **plan schedules and routines for your program**. You also will find an **example** of how an educator might plan schedules and routines for their program using these templates, including an example picture schedule for children and plan for transitions between activities.

Guided Reflection Templates

A daily schedule with regular routines is important for the well-being of children in your care.

- A consistent daily schedule makes it easy for you to make sure children get the food, rest, and play time they need to do well every day.

- A consistent daily schedule makes it easy for children to practice the same activities over time, which can help them develop important skills like walking, putting on their own coat, or balancing blocks on top of each other.

- A consistent daily schedule with routines (such as always sitting at the same table for lunch) helps children feel confident and secure by understanding what is happening now and what will happen next. Having a consistent schedule and routines can also help prevent children from feeling upset about transitioning from one activity to the next.

- A visual schedule with pictures can help young children keep track of the daily schedule without being able to ready (see the example on page 14).

What does your daily schedule look like? When designing a daily schedule, keep the following in mind:

- All programs should have a **consistent daily schedule that aligns with children's ages, strengths, and needs**.

- An appropriate daily schedule for your program does not have to be the same for all children. A daily schedule for one age group (such as all preschoolers) could be different from a daily schedule for a mix of different age groups.

A. Daily Activities

No matter the ages of children in your program, your daily schedule should include a mix of different types of activities.

Use the following checklist to mark the types of activities included in your daily schedule.

Activities in my program	Check
Structured learning time during which children can pick different activities that fit their individual needs and interests	
Active learning time during which children can move	
Pair or small-group time during which children can learn and play together	
Whole-group learning activities (such as doing a group art project)	

Activities in my program	Check
Outdoor play (at least 60 minutes total daily, depending on the weather)	
Meals and snacks	
Time for hygiene (e.g., diapering, hand-washing)	
Rest times (e.g., naps) appropriate for children's ages and needs	
Transitions (e.g., arrival, dismissal)	

☞ For an example of *types of activities for a daily schedule*, see the Example section.

B. Daily Schedule

Your daily schedule also should include the types of activities that happen at about the same time every day (with flexibility in the schedule when needed). As you use the checklist below to design a daily schedule, consider the following tips:

- **Adjust the schedule as needed** based on the needs of children in your program. You can:
    - Update the schedule as children's individual needs change over time. For example, if the children in your program become more active as they get older, you might change quiet reading time after nap to a art and free play time.
    - Change your schedule on some days due to special events, weather, or children's needs. For example, you may decide to have more outdoor play time on the first warm day in spring or the day before a holiday break when the children are especially high-energy.
- **Prepare individualized schedules** for feeding and naptime for infants and toddlers, but still have a daily schedule that most children follow. For example, everyone might have lunch and snacks together, but you might have older children listen to music or audiobooks with headphones while younger children have a short morning nap.
- **Have times when children have specific choices of activities** and time when they can **play freely or independently**.
- Identify **times when you can step back and observe children as they play and interact**.

As an example, outdoor play could be scheduled at 10 a.m., 1 p.m., and 3 p.m. every day and last for 30 minutes each time.

- You can use this activity to create or update your current schedule.
- If you do not have an evening program, you can skip that section in the following checklist.

Use the following checklist to mark the different kinds of activities that happen during the day and enter the times when these activities are scheduled to take place.

Daytime programs	
Time(s)	**Activity**
Morning	**Morning routines**
	Customize these routines to the specific ages and needs of the children in your program. For example, infants will need more regular naps than older toddlers or preschoolers, but some preschoolers and school-age children will not need a nap.
	Diapering, changing, or bathroom times
	☐ to ☐
	☐ to ☐
	☐ to ☐
	Morning snack or feedings times
	☐ to ☐
	☐ to ☐
	☐ to ☐
	Morning nap(s) times
	☐ to ☐
	☐ to ☐
	☐ to ☐
	Morning outdoor play times
	☐ to ☐
	☐ to ☐
	☐ to ☐

Daytime programs	
Time(s)	**Activity**

☐ to ☐	**Arrival activities**
	    Personalized greetings (such as child's choice of handshake with the educator or sharing something they are happy about)
	    Breakfast
	    Outdoor play
	    Independent or free-choice activities
	    Whole-group activity (such as art)
	    Independent activities or free activities

☐ to ☐	**Early morning activities**
	    Morning meeting (e.g., to discuss weather, sing songs)
	    Group learning activity (such as an educator reading a book, children doing a group art project, or an educator demonstrating a science project)
	    Individual or pair learning activities
	    Independent learning activities
	    Outdoor play
	    Indoor free play

☐ to ☐	**Late morning activities**
	    Morning meeting (e.g., to discuss weather, sing songs)
	    Whole-group learning activity (such as an educator reading a book, children doing a group art project, or an educator demonstrating a science project)
	    Individual or small-group learning activities
	    Independent reading or book exploration
	    Outdoor free play
	    Indoor free play

☐ to ☐	**Lunch**

Daytime programs	
Time(s)	**Activity**
Afternoon	**Afternoon Routines**
	Customize these routines to the specific ages and needs of the children in your program. For example, infants will need more regular naps than older toddlers or preschoolers, but some preschoolers and school-age children will not need a nap.
	Diapering, changing, or bathroom times
	[ ] to [ ]
	[ ] to [ ]
	[ ] to [ ]
	Afternoon snack or feedings times
	[ ] to [ ]
	[ ] to [ ]
	[ ] to [ ]
	Afternoon nap(s) times
	[ ] to [ ]
	[ ] to [ ]
	[ ] to [ ]
	After outdoor play times
	[ ] to [ ]
	[ ] to [ ]
	[ ] to [ ]
[ ] to [ ]	**Early afternoon activities**
	Whole-group activity (such as an educator reading a book, children doing a group art project, or an educator demonstrating a science project)
	Individual or small-group learning activities
	Independent reading or book exploration
	Outdoor free play
	Indoor free play

Daytime programs	
Time(s)	**Activity**
to	**Late afternoon activities** Whole-group activity (such as an educator reading a book, children doing a group art project, or an educator demonstrating a science project) Individual learning activities (educator chosen) Independent reading or book exploration Outdoor free play Indoor free play

Evening Programs	
Time	**Activity**
Evening	**Evening routines** *Customize these routines to the specific ages and needs of the children in the program. For example, younger children may have earlier bedtimes than older children.* Dinner times [ ] to [ ] [ ] to [ ] [ ] to [ ] Brushing teeth and other hygiene activities (e.g., washing face) [ ] to [ ] [ ] to [ ] [ ] to [ ] Bedtime(s) [ ] to [ ] [ ] to [ ] [ ] to [ ]

Evening Programs	
Time	**Activity**

[ ] to [ ]	**Arrival activities**
	    Snack
	    Outdoor free play
	    Indoor free play
	    Whole-group activity (such as art)
	    Independent reading or book exploration

[ ] to [ ]	**Early evening activities**
	    Whole-group learning activity (such as an educator reading a book, children doing a group art project, or an educator demonstrating a science project)
	    Individual or small-group learning activities
	    Independent reading or book exploration
	    Outdoor free play
	    Indoor free play

[ ] to [ ]	**Late evening activities**
	    Whole-group learning activity (such as an educator reading a book, children doing a group art project, or an educator demonstrating a science project)
	    Individual or small-group learning activities
	    Independent reading or book exploration
	    Outdoor free play
	    Indoor free play

☞ For an example of a *daily schedule*, see the Examples section.

C. Schedules for Children

It is important that children know the schedule and can keep track of expectations throughout the day.

Use the following checklist to mark the types of supports you provide to children to understand and follow your daily schedule.

In my program, children have the following supports to help them follow the daily schedule	Check
Picture-based schedule on the wall	
Digital clocks visible to older children	
Updates on time or upcoming transitions (e.g., a chime that means children have 5 minutes before switching activities)	
Songs or other transition activities (e.g., playing I Spy with children while gathering to go outside)	

☞ For an example of a picture schedule for children that can be posted on the wall and an example of how to use transitions to move between parts of the daily schedule, see the Examples section. You can also take photos of places in your program to use in the schedule (such as pictures of the sink for hand-washing time).

Examples

A. Daily Activities

Activities in my program	Check
Quiet learning time during which children can pick different activities that fit their individual needs and interests	☒
Active learning time during which children can make noise and move around	☒
Pair or small-group time during which children can learn and play together	☐
Whole-group learning activities (such as circle time, reading a book to all children, or doing a group art project)	☐
Outdoor play (at least 60 minutes total daily, depending on the weather)	☒
Rest times (e.g., naps) appropriate for children's ages and needs	☒

B. Daily Schedule

In my program, we have the following activities in our daily schedule:

Breakfast	Breakfast and social conversation at the table
Opening Activities 7:00–9:00 a.m.	Free play with toys and materials safe for children by age and interest of the child, such as the following: • Books • Drawing supplies • Magnetic tiles • Puzzles • Blocks
Morning Meeting 9:00–9:15 a.m.	• Review the day of the week, weather, and today's activities • Songs and dancing • Whole-group story reading • Show and tell
Group Art 9:15—9:45 a.m.	Watercolors
Bathroom Break	15 minutes

Active Morning Activities 10:00–10:30 a.m.	Assigned learning activities for children by age level and interest, including small-group activities such as the following: • Reading aloud or describing pictures from books (All Ages) • Tactile exploration (All Ages) • Letter tracing, writing practice, and drawing practice (Toddler, Preschool, and School-Age) • Sorting beads and beans using tongs or chopsticks (Toddler and Preschool) • Using number blocks to create sequences and solve mathematics problems (Preschool and School Age) • Memory games (Toddler, Preschool, and School-Age)
Snack	
First Outdoor Play or Physical Activity 10:30—11:00 a.m.	If the weather is safe and comfortable. If not, use active indoor games such as dance or exercise (e.g., jumping jacks). Free play outside with the following: • Balls • Chalk • Bikes, skateboards, etc. • Magnifying glasses • Bubbles • Sand
Storytime 11:00–11:30 a.m.	• Snack (have children take turns helping prepare and pass out the snack) • Group story reading
Morning Independent Play or Rest 11:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	Free play with toys and materials safe for children by age, including the following: • Books • Dramatic play centers • Drawing supplies • Collage • Magnetic tiles • Towers • Puzzles • Nesting cups Morning nap for infants and toddlers
Lunchtime 12:00–1 p.m.	Lunch indoors or outdoors, weather permitting
Afternoon Nap or Rest 2:00–3:00 p.m.	• Naps using cots or mats with blankets and pillows Quiet corners with books or drawing materials for older children
Second Outdoor Play or Physical Activity 1:00–2:00 p.m.	If the weather is safe and comfortable. If not, use active indoor games such as dance or exercise (e.g., jumping jacks). Free play outside with the following: • Balls • Chalk • Bikes, skateboards, etc. • Magnifying glasses • Bubbles • Sand

Snack	
Afternoon Exploration Activities 3:00–4:00 p.m.	Free choice or assigned exploration activities, including the following: • Water play • Balls, cars, and ramps • Clay • Watercolors • Finger painting • Science books • Growing seeds and gardening • Touch, smell, and taste tests • Collage • Musical instruments
Third Outdoor Play or Physical Activity 4:00–5:00 p.m.	If the weather is safe and comfortable. If not, use active indoor games such as dance or exercise (e.g., jumping jacks). Free play outside with the following: • Balls • Bikes, skateboards, etc. • Bubbles • Chalk • Magnifying glasses • Sand
Afternoon Learning Activities 5:00–6:00 p.m.	Organized small-group activities, such as reading, art, or creative play (e.g., building towers)

C. Schedules for Children

Picture Schedule Example

Free Play/ Independent Play **7:00 a.m.**	
Circle **9:00 a.m.**	
Learning **9:30 a.m.**	
Storytime **10:30 a.m.**	

Outside Play/ Gross Motor **11:00 a.m.**	
Free Play/ Independent Play **11:30 a.m.**	
Lunch **12:00 p.m.**	
Outside Play/ Movement **1:00 p.m.**	
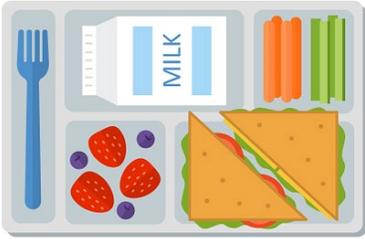
Nap/Quiet Time **1:30 p.m.**	
Exploration **2:00 p.m.**	
Free Play/ Independent Play **3:30 p.m.**	

Transitions Example

Morning Meeting Ending 9:30 a.m.	• Tell children what activity is coming next using the picture schedule: "It's 9:30 a.m. I can see the time on the clock on the wall. What time is it? Time for our morning learning activities!" Ask a child "What is next on the schedule" and ask them to touch it. • Give children an activity to do during waiting times: "Remember the book we read about monsters yesterday? Show me your favorite and most scary monster face while I give everyone directions!" • Provide directions quickly to reduce wait time, making eye contact and pointing at children as you say their names: "Marco, Sansa, and Rubin, please go to the blue table for writing. I will meet you there with the babies in a minute. Juan and Keisha, please get the math blocks from the shelf and see if you can make the numbers on this sheet."

Morning Learning Activities 9:30–10:30 a.m.	• Hold and interact with younger children (such as infants) while helping other children with age-appropriate activities (such as tracing letters versus writing words on their own). • Observe children working independently and share praise ("it was such a fun idea to make your numbers into towers") and advise as needed.
Morning Learning Activities Ending 10:20–10:30 a.m.	• Use a chime and tell children that they have 3–5 minutes left for their morning activities. • About 3–5 minutes before the next activity (10:25), play a special "clean-up" sound and start to sing the clean-up song. Watch as children put materials away and offer help where needed. • Remind children to come to the snack and storytime area when they are done cleaning up.
Snack and Storytime Beginning 10:30 a.m.	• Praise children for cleaning up by describing what they did well. • Introduce the snack helper for the day and the prepared snack: "Marco will be helping us with snack this morning. He is passing out cups with crackers and dried fruit. Please remember to say thank you to Marco when he gives you your snack!" • Introduce the story while the snack is being served: "Today during snack time, I will read you a book about bugs in the garden. Do you like bugs? Do you think they are icky or cool? I like looking at pictures of bugs in books, but sometimes they feel icky when I see them in real life. Bugs are important though—we need them for plants and food to grow. Let's learn about the bugs we can find in gardens here and at home from this book."

Additional Resources

For more information on schedule planning and examples, check out these resources and videos from the Virtual Lab School:

- https://www.virtuallabschool.org/fcc/program-management/lesson-6
- https://www.virtuallabschool.org/fcc/learning-environments/lesson-5
- https://www.virtuallabschool.org/fcc/creative-expression/lesson-3
- https://www.virtuallabschool.org/fcc/learning-environments/lesson-2

For examples of picture schedules, check out these resources from Head Start:

https://www.headstart.gov/children-disabilities/article/routines-activities