Routine

Between stay at home orders, summer vacations, and now the prospect of very chaotic back to school schedules, it seems like keeping a reliable schedule and routine is nearly impossible. But maintaining a routine and predictable schedule are important for mental health in the following ways:

- **Routines Reduce Stress and Increase Efficiency**: When we have a daily routine, it reduces the need to make decisions throughout the day. With a routine, we know exactly what tasks we need to do and when we need to do them, without having to think too much. When we are finished with one task, we know what comes next. Activities become standardized and we become more efficient as a result.

- **Instills Good Habits**: The secret to building good habits is repetition. When we design a routine that works for us, it facilitates developing good habits by encouraging us to repeat the same tasks over and over again. Just like brushing our teeth every morning, adhering to a routine allows us to foster habits that match our goals and aspirations.

- **Reduces the Need for Willpower**: When we brush our teeth in the morning, it does not require a lot of willpower because most of us have made it a daily ritual. We hardly think about having to brush our teeth; we simply do it. The same holds true for other tasks when we follow a routine. It simply becomes, well, ‘routine’!

- **Provides Predictability**: No matter what’s going on in our day, knowing that we will be having dinner around 6:00 p.m. and going to bed around 10:00, can be a real comfort. The certainty of our routine can help us manage the uncertainties that life throws at us. Coping with unpredictable periods of time can feel more doable when we have a little structure in place.

The most important part of establishing a routine is to first decide what’s realistic. Think honestly about what you can implement as an ongoing routine. Is it realistic to think that your children will be able to sustain a full hour of reading time five days per week? Maybe, but maybe not. Also be sure to coordinate your routine with others in your home. If your new routine means you take a walk first thing every morning, for example, make sure that’s okay for everyone else in your home.

Next, write down your plans. Put your daily routine down on paper and hang a calendar up for all to see that is filled out with plans for the week. Younger children might enjoy crossing off daily tasks throughout the day.

Lastly, it’s important to maintain some flexibility in your routine. Things will come up that disrupt your schedule. That’s okay. You can do one of two things: adapt for the long term and create a new routine, or understand that this change is temporary and you can reinstate your routine tomorrow, next week, or in a few months.

Implementing a daily routine is especially important for children. Children thrive when they have structure and predictability. With the confusion and stress of the coming school year, implementing a daily routine and weekly family schedule may be more important now than ever. And now is a perfect time to get started.

If you, or any member of your immediate family or household, are struggling with this or any other topic, please reach out to Family Services EAP today! Our counselors are available for **FREE** and **CONFIDENTIAL** appointments! Contact us at 978-327-6666, info@FamilyServicesEAP.org or submit an inquiry online at FamilyServicesEAP.org. Appointments are currently taking place via telehealth.