

Patterns for Consistent Routines

Routines provide a simple and predictable sequence of actions that promote the development of anticipation and participation. For example, a child is handed a swimsuit and he anticipates that he will get dressed to swim. A life jacket is then presented and the child is allowed to feel the water with his toes or fingers; he knows he will enter the water. Finally, the life jacket is removed and a towel is given to the child to indicate that swim time is over: it is time to get dried off and dressed.

Every time the child goes swimming the same objects are used in the same way and sequence. Later, this simple sequence of actions and object cues can be expanded to target more or different forms of communication, interaction, and participation.

Participating in meaningful routines throughout the day helps develop a child's sense of confidence and control over his environment. The child begins to recognize the people, activities, and objects in his world. He begins to anticipate what comes next.

Establishing a series of routine activities throughout the day provides multiple opportunities for learning to occur. Children of all ability levels can participate in basic daily routines, making this pattern for learning a wonderful tool for any classroom.

Why are routines so beneficial?

- Routines provide predictability. Given issues with sensory perception, children with deafblindness receive incomplete information from environmental cues, such as the time on a clock, the movement of people and objects, and verbal messages.
- Routines build a framework for learning and communication. Routines develop the sense that activities have beginnings, middles, and ends, thereby weaving a cluster of people, actions, objects, and locations into a meaningful whole.
- Routines lead to smoother transitions. Transitions between a day's activities provide many opportunities for learning, but can be confusing for people with deafblindness.
- Routines contribute to the development of concepts.
- Routines provide a comfortable familiarity, which allows a child to use her energy and attention more efficiently.
- Routines decrease stress and increase confidence.
- Routines build a foundation of memories for additional learning. Having an organized experience develops understanding. Understanding an experience allows a person to learn from it.

Ideas for applying this topic with beginning communicators:

- Routine activities can include those related to health and hygiene (restroom trips, washing hands, cleaning tables), transitions (switching classes, going to gym), and family or class activities (mealtime).
- Routines should have a clear beginning, middle and end.
- Start with routines which have a limited number of steps.
- Develop play routines, like peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake, which have a rhythmic and predictable structure.
- Consider which of the child's goals or outcomes can be practiced during a routine. Embed that goal or outcome in the routine.
- Remember consistency: Same sequence of steps, same position, same materials, same pacing, same prompts.
- When routines involve moving from place to place, use the same route; use landmarking cues throughout the route.
- When impairments are severe, consistency must be rigorously maintained for students to be able to predict what will happen next. Even when impairments are more moderate, consistency speeds up learning.
- Cue routines with an object, picture or language that relates directly to the routine.
- Items which are used for one routine can be placed in a container together. This may help the child understand the relationship between the objects.
- Include routines that involve peers.

Ideas for applying this topic with more advanced communicators:

- Involve the child in the entire process of the routine, including gathering materials (get bin with art materials), participating in the activity (engage in an art project, with partial to full participation), using the product of the activity (hanging picture on the wall) and putting away materials (put bin with art materials back on the shelf).
- Increase the number of steps in routines.
- Organize the cues for the various routines of the day into a calendar system.
- Provide fade prompts throughout a routine.
- Take advantage of natural prompts (when one step acts as a cue for the next step) within routines.
- Select activity routines that can be used to expand the child's opportunities for interaction, communication, and participation.
- Activities may be selected to provide a balance across recreational, vocational, and daily living activities, as well as in other areas.

Resources:

Predictable Classroom Routines from <http://www.inclusiveschools.org/tip.asp>, April 2007

"Make it Routine," by Robbie Blaha. P.S. NEWS!, Vol. IV, No. 3, July 1991, pages 10-12

"Routines: The Foundation of Learning and Communication," Florida Outreach Project Family and Friends Newsletter

"Operational Definitions of Best Practice," by Leslie Buchanan. Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, 2004

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