Structure and Routine during a Pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic has impacted everything from our daily schedules to where we can go and what we can do. These changes can be challenging for everyone, and this is especially true for children, as we emphasise that routines and predictability are a part of their developmental needs.During a time of crisis when so many things are unknown, creating a routine, and helping children become aware and implement the routine helps children in several ways. Lets see how:

- Creating a routine for kids at home during COVID-19 , can provide a structure - which is usually what they were used to when they went to school or parents went for work or did chores or work at home.This might introduce a degree of predictability during times of uncertainty.
- Structure promotes a sense of safety. The more a child can anticipate what lies ahead, the better they feel about their day and are more likely to be prepared to face daily challenges and expectations.
- It helps children to feel a sense of agency - What is it that I can do to help myself and feel more in control of my life. Especially when everything feels "not in my control".

Children do as they see adults doing. Therefore before we speak about what we can do with our children, it's also important to talk about ***you***. We all need to feel calm and grounded to be able to be there for our children. Remember that watching you do any of these is in itself a learning moment for your child and a teachable moment for you. If you have other family members at home, try to ***divide your daily parental/home responsibilities equitably and consistently*** amongst yourselves, so that no one person feels overburdened. We have some helpful tips and suggestions for you as well, for structuring your daily routine.

1. Transition rituals:

- Start your day with a ***calming morning routine***:
  - ➔ Wake up, open your curtains, let the natural light in, make your bed etc.
  - ➔ Shower, change your clothes, as if you still need to go somewhere.
  - ➔ Have a good cup of coffee or tea to have some '*adult - me time'*
  - ➔ Try doing this before your child wakes up and you get caught up in the daily activities.
  - ➔ If your child is an early riser then make a night routine before you sleep.

- Even during the day, ***incorporate mindful breaks*** for yourself as parents

e.g. when your child takes an afternoon nap. When you take a break:

- ➔ Do something with your hands, which is ritualistic - like a Zen drawing or painting , or pot a plant, cooking, knitting etc.
- ➔ Include some simple stretching exercises everyday into your daily routine. Best would be when you are moving from one activity to another. Like when you finish your office work and get ready for some home chores or family time.

2. Pre-sleep rituals: Create a pool of some grounding and calming pre-sleep rituals for yourself - these could include a warm bath/shower, some quick journaling/reflective exercises, giving yourself a relaxing head massage etc. as per your preference and convenience.

Following are a few suggestions on establishing a routine for children during these uncertain times. Before creating a routine, few things to keep in mind:

1. Create a ***simple, consistent, and flexible, routine*** for your children. If you are experiencing trouble with developing a routine, start small, and gradually build onto it as you see it working for your child. Also, remember to keep it aligned with your general capacity, and not over-commit to an extensive schedule.
2. For older children, ***create a routine collaboratively with them***. This will help them take more ownership of their day, and also motivate them to follow through on different daily tasks.
3. Keep your ***child's energy levels*** in mind while creating a schedule. Schedule more difficult tasks such as longer projects/classwork when they are most active and refreshed, and save easier/less challenging tasks for a later time in the day.
4. Allow for ***natural breaks*** for your children, through the day. This time can be spent on relaxing, engaging in a hobby etc.
5. ***Bedtime routine***: Create a consistent bedtime ritual/routine for your children, which could include story time, snuggles, massage or a warm bath, depending on your convenience and your child's preference.

A routine does not mean creating a time table, but understanding what all to prioritize in your child's routine.

1. Divide your day into ***five/six, simple, fixed routines***, as per your family's convenience.
2. Pick wake-up times and bedtimes that suit your family best. If your child is attending online school, structure your day keeping in mind the beginning of their class time, and allow sufficient time for them in the morning to get

prepared. Having ***consistent wake-up and bedtimes*** is essential to maintain children's biorhythms, which have a significant impact on their overall development and functioning.

3. Try to schedule dedicated time for the following during the day/week, as per your suitability:

➔ ***Family time:*** At some point during the day/week, engage in doing something collaboratively, with all the family members.

➔ ***Daily living skills***: Allow opportunities for your child to build on their daily living skills, by providing them space to engage in age-appropriate chores e.g. laying the dinner table, helping with laundry etc. This would also build on their sense of agency, helping them feel empowered.

➔ ***Play time***: Setting aside some time in the day for natural playtime for your kids; this could include activities wherein they engage by themselves, or even virtual playdates etc.

➔ ***Talking time:*** Create pockets of time wherein your children can talk to you, safely express their feelings, and cope with the inevitable stress of a pandemic. This can be through talking, or just being with you in a mindful way e.g, doing some mindful breathing exercises, expression through art/drawings etc.

➔ ***Movement/Exercise time:*** Physical movement provides children with a healthy channel for self-expression. Include some movement in the form of yoga, dancing, walks, obstacle courses etc. in their daily routine.

Some more helpful resources that you can refer to:

- https://www.childrenscolorado.org/conditions-and-advice/parenting/parenting-articles/creating-normalcy-for-kids-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/
- https://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/patients/coronavirus-information/family-resources/routine-structure
- https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/ed/pdf/promo/learning_at_home/ALP_CreatingStructureProvidingSupport.pdf