

Kids love routine ... but add a little variety, too

The art of a parent or a teacher is to keep a child's environment predictable enough to feel safe, but challenging enough to be exciting.

Winston Churchill wrote, "Human beings are of three classes: those who are toiled to death, those who are worried to death and those who are bored to death."

So it is with our children. We run the risk of creating places for them that are full of adult directed busy-work or toil, and their personal development is misdirected. We might create circumstances that are so unpredictable that the children are constantly worried about when the

next meal might be or who is going to bully them next, and therefore development is paralyzed. Children subjected to environments that are so foreseeable that boredom pervades, become apathetic or mischievous.

In today's world, many children seem to be on a tight schedule from the time they awake until bedtime with school, team sports, special lessons, homework and more. These children don't have the luxury of time to figure out who they are, or the time to dream of what they might do with their lives.

Other children are overwhelmed by their circumstances. Television news and school activities have these children despairing about global warming, carbon footprints, and the world's water supply. Or

perhaps the family is in turmoil. Bedtimes vary. Meal times and places are inconsistent. These children don't know who will pick them up from school or which house they



will wake up in the morning. These children's are caught in a whirlpool and their development doesn't move forward. These children are robbed of the joy in their lives.

Some children are in situations where the same routine, the same order of the day, or the same schedule of 15-minute activities, dulls their intellectual curiosity. Boredom disrupts development and feeds indifference or rebellion in these children.

Young children thrive on routine when we can avoid the boredom of predictability, when we can give children new experiences in intriguing doses, and when we can provide activities that are based on the child's interest versus the needs of the adults in charge.

What would an interesting and exciting daily pattern look like for a

child?

The pillars of stability for a child's daily routine are mealtimes and sleep. Bedtime and wake-up times for a child should be the same

everyday within fifteen minutes. Three to five-year-olds need between 11 to 13 hours of sleep per day. Children ages six to twelve need 10 to 11 hours of sleep per day, on average. Arrival and pickup times from school or babysitter should be the same everyday. Meal-times should be on a reasonable schedule. Basic physical needs of food and sleep need to be on a predictable time-

table to help the child feel safe and worry free.

The time between meals and rest needs to offer an assortment of activities—indoors and out—along with presentation of new skills, choices to practice new skills and do activities, as well as time to reflect and be quiet.

Imagine a place filled with pur-



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poseful activities offered to children as free choice activities. Imagine a place built with an underlying structure of predictable times for food, sleep, arrival and departure. Imagine a place that allows our children to create what Churchill might call a fourth group of human beings: People who work for pleasure, and for whom work and pleasure form an exciting and interesting pattern for life.

Imagine a place where children follow a routine of ... live to love, love to learn, learn to live ... ad infinitum. Imagine a routine where children thrive.

Kids Talk™ is an award-winning column dealing with childhood development issues written by Maren Stark Schmidt, M.Ed. She has more than 25 years experience working with young children and is the author of Understanding Montessori: A Guide for Parents. Contact her via e-mail at maren@kidstalknews.

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