



# Why routines matter for growing teenage brains

How routines help teenagers



Teenage brains experience big periods of growth during adolescence. This can sometimes make life pretty hard for you and your teenager as they grapple with the hormonal changes in their bodies, the rapid growth of their brain, and the many transitions they experience in the world around them. Routines can really help teenagers navigate this complicated time because they bring structure and predictability to a teenager's world and prevent them experiencing the stress associated with sudden change. Home routines are even more important right now to help manage the unsettling impacts of COVID-19.

## Regular sleep

A regular sleep routine is essential for a growing brain. Encourage your teenager to go to bed and wake up at a regular time each day. On average, teenagers need 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night. Generally, spending at least two hours away from screens prior to bed time can help teenagers wind down. Relaxing, calm and enjoyable activities such as reading a book or listening to soothing music in a dim light can help prepare the brain for sleep. Remember that the glow from electronic screens can confuse the brain and interfere with the process of winding down, so encourage your teenager to avoid social media, and texting or calling friends in the hour or two before bed.

# Regular exercise

Research has found that regular exercise and physical activity helps teenagers to learn. This doesn't mean every teenager needs to be on a sports team. Physical activity could include exercise in any form including a dance class, yoga, swimming, gardening, hiking or even walking to the bus stop or to school. Other benefits of regular exercise include improved mental health and wellbeing, stronger bones, healthy heart, and muscle development.

# Regular morning routine

Predictable and consistent routines can help your teenager prepare for their day at school. During the teenage years, the part of the brain that drives emotion develops faster than the part that controls impulses. This means teenagers are more prone to risky, boundary-testing and inconsistent behaviour. That's why structure is so important. Structure promotes the self-regulation teenagers need and supports them in becoming self-reliant so they can better manage themselves.

# Encourage your teenager to plan their own routine

Talk with your teenager about situations that make them feel tired or stressed. This kind of conversation is ideal for working together towards a routine that might help your child manage themselves better. Ideally let your teenager initiate the discussion and listen to what they have to say. Let your teenager come up with their own plan for their routine and encourage them to document it so you can talk about it together. Once you implement the new routine, celebrate the wins, however small, and return to the conversation if you think the routine is becoming inconsistent. Talking to your teenager is not always easy, so here are some tips to help you.

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