

Building Healthy Routines: Helping Students Help Themselves

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TOP TIPS FROM
OUR PANELISTS
PLUS THEIR
RECOMMENDED
RESOURCES



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For chores, encourage your child to pair tasks with something enjoyable for an instant reward: Empty the dishwasher while a favorite snack is in the microwave, listen to a podcast while folding laundry, or chat with a friend while walking the dog.

Moods are contagious! Parents, changing your language can change the vibe for a child or teen from “Do I have to??” to “I can do this!” For example: Instead of saying “You never pick up after yourself!” try specific praise when your kid is doing something right. You can also use these phrases to change the mood and increase the chances of getting the task done: “Let’s try putting things where we see them before we head to the car. That’s what I do with my keys.” or “I get how you are feeling. Sometimes I don’t feel like doing my work either. I can help you get started then you can finish up.”

These 3 apps can be useful: [Daylio](#) for mood tracking, [Sleep Cycle](#) for sleep hygiene, and [Fabriq](#) to improve social habits.

Suggested resource: [The Smart but Scattered](#) series of books for EF development across the lifespan by Dawson and Guare



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For medication management, if your child's morning routine is well established, keep medication organizers right next to the toothbrush or on the bureau where your child is getting dressed. If medication time is triggering difficult emotions for your child, a habit of quiet mindfulness (5 minutes of meditation or yoga poses, for example) beforehand can help ease into this routine.

For younger children, find the rhythm within a routine. Adding rhythmical components to an otherwise mundane task such as brushing teeth can increase follow-through to completion. Try playing music with the tempo your child might use while completing a given task.

Positive self-talk visuals or cues can help improve motivation in a particular skill or activity. If grooming in the morning is a challenge for a younger child, place positive self-talk reminders on the mirror “I got this”, “GO me!” Or place photos of your child doing the activity anywhere the routine occurs for further self-coaching.

Suggested resource: [Stop, Breathe, and Think Kids](#) app - Mindfulness app for children to help them discover and develop their superpowers of sleep, being calm, learning to breathe or resolving conflicts.



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Make good habits easy and make bad habits hard. This is called “Choice Architecture.” For example: Make brushing teeth easy by purchasing an electric toothbrush, make healthy food choices easy by having cut-up fruit and veggies ready to grab, make sedentary activities harder by putting remote controls/gaming devices out of easy reach.

Help your kids become conscious consumers and allow them to make their own purchases. Research indicates that children and young adults are more likely to participate in family initiatives if they have a choice in what they do. Want them to eat more healthy foods? Have them select ingredients and cook the meal according to a recipe they select. Want them to shower more? Let them buy their Axe Body Wash or Dr. Squatch soap. Want them to shave? Purchase those cool razors from Harry’s or DollarShaveClub.

Schedule tasks rather than making a To-Do list in order to build good routines. For example, Saturday afternoon is room-cleaning and organizing, Sunday morning is for laundry, Sunday-Thursday evenings, the backpack gets readied for the morning. Model how you make your own routines and invite your child to create their own. The huge bonus here is that over time it becomes automatic to maintain these routines.

Suggested resource: [Smelly Teen? Let's Talk Teen Hygiene](#)



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Help your child reflect on their current routines and then problem-solve more effective routines. For example, if they misplace their soccer jersey consistently because after games it gets left in a heap on the floor, work out together what a better choice might look like. Help your child to make a new plan and work out a reminder system that your child agrees to.

Some guided observation can help your child recognize a mismatch between their intentions and their actions. For example, if your child has a hard time winding down before bedtime, ask what they usually do before bed and how it makes them feel. They may say they watch their favorite show because it's exciting and they can't wait to find out what happens next. Then ask if there's a better feeling to have right before bedtime. They may say that feeling relaxed is a better fit for that time of day - so that their mind can have time to slow down. Help them identify activities that give them a relaxed feeling. Maybe it's sketching, meditation, a warm shower, or something else that works for them. Instead of telling them what to do, you've allowed them an opportunity to understand themselves and their needs and adjust their actions accordingly (with a little guidance from you, of course!).

Suggested resources: [6 Tips for Helping Your High-Schooler Learn to Self-Advocate](#)

[Self-Advocacy Sentence Starters for Kids Who Learn and Think Differently](#)

[When](#) by Daniel Pink