

Routine for a 3-4 year old at Nursery School

All children (and many adults) feel happier, safer and more confident if they have a regular routine. Exact timing is not important but the order of things is. Learning a regular pattern helps your child to be confident they will get what they need throughout the day. A child who is not confident that her/his needs will be met *will* take things into their own hands – which is often where problems for parents or carers begin.

We all know the most important basic needs for our children – food, loving attention, and sleep. However, fitting them into the day is not always simple. 3-6 year old children need **10 - 12 hours sleep day**. Children at this age typically go to bed between 7.00 and 9.00 p.m. and wake up around 6.00 and 8.00 a.m., just as they did when they were younger. At 3, most children are still napping, while at 5, most are not. Naps gradually become shorter as well. **Food and positive, loving attention** can often be combined to save time. Eat meals together as a family as often as possible. Try to make mealtimes pleasant with conversation and sharing. Involve your children in preparing meals (children may be more willing to eat or try foods that they help prepare).

So a daily routine may look like something like this:

About 7.00 a.m. - Get up, wash hands and face, clean teeth.

First.... Have breakfast together if you can. Get a fix of food and loving attention before the hard work of getting dressed (It is hard work for a child – scale up your clothes, make the material two or three times as thick with enormous buttons and zips – it would wear you out!).

Next.... Get dressed and ready to go.

*You might swap the order of breakfast/dressing – but remember that the needs that your child will be thinking about are **food and attention**. Dressing is a convention which adults find important, but children may not and this may therefore be a time of conflict. Allow a good ½ hour for each of these activities.*

About 8.30 a.m. - Travel to school for the morning session or get busy with work/play

Mid-morning - Remember to have a fix of **food and positive attention**. At Nursery School we have milk/water together in our key groups. At home, or out-and-about, you and your child may have been together but busy in different ways so this is a good time for just a bit of extra special attention. It's about sharing our experience of the morning –talking about what has happened and making sense of it all before we move on.

Lunchtime - At St Philip's Marsh Nursery School this is quite early at **11.30 a.m.** If not at school, then between **12.00** and **1.00 p.m.** is a good time. The important thing is that this should also be a time of shared positive attention. At St Philip's Marsh Nursery School we sit down and talk with the children even if we are not eating food.

Nap time/quiet time - Find a *regular* time that fits with your day. After food is a good time so either after lunch or after a later snack. If your child has a full day at Nursery School they may sleep on the way home or when they get home. If you fit this in, limit it to 45 minutes to 1 hour – before a gentle but persistent wake up (any longer will lead to deeper sleep, difficulty getting back to work/play, and possible problems at bedtime). As your child gets older you may only need a little quiet time together, say ten minutes of sharing a book.

Snack time - At Nursery, this is about **1.30 p.m.** because of early lunch (**2.00 to 3.00 p.m.** is a good time). Remember to make it a special time together for **attention** if you can – even if it is only for a few minutes. The average 3-4 year old laughs 400 times a day but an adult laughs only 4 times. Try and share laughter here if nothing else.

Evening meal - Fit this in between **5.30** and **6.30 p.m.** If you eat earlier your child may need a drink of milk later on. If you eat later they may only need a drink of water before bed. Eat together as a family if you can – it makes a huge difference to children's language learning.

Get ready for bed - Start this early at about **6.30 p.m.** (if you eat late you will start soon after finishing food). Although children need their 10-11 hours' sleep, they will put their need for loving attention first at this time. Adults may think that **bath time** is about hygiene, and your child can learn this too, but for them the close attention is probably what counts. Your child may also need a **last drink** before **brushing teeth**. They will enjoy **sharing a book** with you – it is about attention again. It doesn't need to be a story: some children prefer a more factual book which is good too - as long as you can read or talk a little about what is in the book.

At about **7.30 p.m.** a **regular bedtime song** will send a clear message that it is time for sleep again.