

Parent Aware Tip Sheets

Creating an Appropriate Daily Schedule

How do you know if you have an appropriate daily schedule?

In child care/early education, it is important to ensure that the schedule of daily events is appropriate for the children. A predictable schedule makes it easier for children to fall into a routine, and helps them know what to expect each day.

What is important to consider when planning a daily schedule?

- Ensure that providers plan blocks of time for children to actively explore their environment and the materials available to them. The authors of the Environment Rating Scales define “free play” as being a time when children are able to choose the materials they want, the space they use, and the peers with whom they want to play. This differs from adult-directed times, such as large or small group time, when adults choose the space, materials or peers for children. **Free play should be available to children every day, both indoors and outdoors** (weather permitting).
- Routines such as meals/snacks, nap/rest, and toileting/diapering should occur at predictable times each day.
- There should be some **flexibility to the schedule** based on children’s needs. Flexibility might include playing outside for a little longer than is usual on a nice day, serving a meal/snack early if children are hungry, or allowing a tired child to lay down to rest a little early.
- Daily schedules do not necessarily have to be time-based, as long as there is a predictable set of events each day and meets the needs of most children. In fact, event-based schedules often offer greater flexibility. For example, in a time-based schedule, clean up from free play is done at 10:00 so the children can go outside by 10:15. In an event-based schedule, clean up from free play happens as caregivers notice children finishing up their activities, and then go outside when cleanup is complete. It is helpful to **post a written schedule** in your child care/early education area.
- It is essential that the daily schedule be planned in a way that minimizes the transition time between activities. A couple of examples of how to accomplish this are: to ensure that materials for the next activity are set out before the activity begins, allow children to eat right after hand washing and individualize toileting/diapering time to avoid long lines.
- While the Environment Rating Scales do not require a whole group time, most caregivers do plan at least one gathering daily of most or all the children. It is important to keep in mind that in order to participate and learn during group time, children must have social, language and cognitive skills that develop as they grow. Often, child care providers/early educators feel that they must get through a certain amount of learning material, without regard to children’s attention spans or interest level. Making sure that activities done in whole groups are developmentally appropriate (not too easy or too hard) and that there are plenty of opportunities for active participation by children will help to avoid boredom and some behavioral disruptions.