

The Beginner's Step-by-Step Guide to Creating a Family Rhythm

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Life as a parent can seem like an endless to do list. Days are filled to the brim and it is easy to fall prey to feelings of overwhelm. It is even easier to let chaos take over. By the end of the day, many parents feel like all they have done is chased their tail trying to keep it all somewhat together.



Then there are those families where each day genuinely has a peaceful flow. That endless to-do list is actually manageable. There is time for work and there is time for play. There is even time to enjoy life. Is this even possible?

Yes!

Children (especially those under the age of seven) thrive on knowing what comes next in their day. When mom or dad is running amuck in a constant frenzy of start-stop, children simply cannot handle this. Neurologically they are unable to make sense of the flurry of chaos they are thrust into. This in turn leads to meltdowns, lack of cooperation, emotional irregularity, difficulty sleeping, general restlessness, and a host of other less than desirable qualities. **Parenting a child who has been forced to “deal” with an unpredictable routine becomes challenging at best.** It also often means that mom or dad gets even less done than planned. There is no balance to the day.

This is where the importance of [establishing a family rhythm](#) comes in. *Rhythm is the daily, weekly and yearly recurring activities in our lives that are done with intention and love.* These activities typically have a pattern which reflect the natural order of life. Rhythm creates balance and organic order in life.

Rhythm is:

- Based on anchor points (wake up time, nap time, bedtime, meal times, and scheduled obligations such as school and work)
- Flexible and fluid
- Inclusive of everyone's needs
- Calming
- Predictable
- Natural

Rhythm is not:

- A concrete schedule

- Rigid
- Stressful
- Static
- Forced

A lot of parents have difficulty distinguishing between a schedule, a routine, and rhythm. Schedules are harsh, rigid, and demanding and center on the concept of “at.” (We take nap at 3:00). A routine is a typical pattern with some uncertainty and centers on the concepts of “sometimes” and “usually.” (We usually take naps by 3:00, but our day usually falls apart at some point so sometimes we do not get a nap). Rhythm is a flow where B happens after A and C comes before D. Rhythm is natural and organic. The key to rhythm is that it centers on the concept of “around.” (We take a nap around 3:00). It molds around the lifestyle already in place for a family. Rhythm helps children know what comes next in their day and often allows them to make an easy transition to the next activity or anchor point. Rhythm helps parents stay committed to their to-do list in a way that allows for flexibility and much less stress. When you practice a healthy rhythm, you can more easily see and adapt to big changes or shifts that may occur.

How does one go about establishing a daily rhythm?

Take a good look at what your average day looks like and decide if there is any sort of rhythmical flow to it already. If so, you are off to a solid start and can craft a more detailed rhythm from there. If your days seem to be in constant flux, you will need to evaluate how you can craft a better flow to each day. *Here is a beginner’s Step by Step Guide to establishing rhythm:*

1. Brainstorm what your typical day looks like for each day of the week. Ask yourself the following:

- Do you and your children typically wake up and go to sleep around the same time each and every day?
- Does your family typically prepare and eat meals at the same time every day?
- Do you and your children typically go outside every day and if so, is it around the same time?
- Do you and your children follow high energy activities with quieter activities?
- Do you have set days where you run certain errands?
- Do you have set days where you and/or your children participate in certain activities or classes?
- What do your household chores look like? Do you have chores that you typically perform on certain days or are they all over the map, if at all?
- What other scheduled occurrences are there? (School drop off and pick up, work obligations, or church?)
- When do you take care of things like bathing and exercise?

2. Develop a list outlining your main anchor points. As mentioned before these are typically waking up in the morning, nap times, going to bed, meal times, and scheduled occurrences without flexibility. Spend two weeks focusing on those anchor points. Find a way to naturally allow these to happen within the same 15-30 minute window each day if they have not been already. Once you have established anchor points, you can begin to add other elements to your daily rhythm.

3. Look at what errands you run on a regular basis. How often do you grocery shop? How often do you pick up pet food? Household supplies? Personal items? Is there a pattern to when you run your errands? If so, commit to running certain errands on the same day and time of the week. Your children will come to expect that Monday is grocery day and every other Thursday is the big-box retailer shopping trip. There will be less resistance to running errands because it will become part of the flow of that particular day.

4. Focus on household “work.” Again, make a detailed list of chores (both inside the home and outside) that you attempt to tackle each week as well as those that get neglected regularly. Clearly chores like laundry, dishes, garbage collection, vacuuming/mopping, and perhaps watering plants are things that should get done regularly. Dusting, cleaning bathrooms, cleaning the kitchen, gardening and the like should be done with some frequency but perhaps not as regularly as the above mentioned chores. General organizing (keeping clutter to a minimum) is truly a daily task. Once you have your list, prioritize what will get done when and by whom then add it into your rhythm where it fits best. After a few weeks, chores that seemed impossible to complete will slowly become second nature to the entire family because they are simply part of the flow of the day. (My daughter knows that every morning we put a load of laundry in the washer and fold the laundry that was in the dryer from the day before. We do this before anything else. She wakes up and walks straight to the dryer to unload. I don’t have to say a word. It’s just what we do).

5. Concentrate on playing. After you have done all of the heavy lifting, making sure everyone is sleeping, eating, and that the household chores are attended to, begin figuring out what play time will look like. Where can you naturally add in outdoor play, indoor play, arts/crafts, etc? Everything does not need to happen every single day. Arts/crafts could be designated three times per week. Outdoor play should happen every day but perhaps one day is a trip to the zoo or museum while two days a week are park days. Outdoor time might be longer on certain days than others. Make sure that you are not stacking too many child centered activities together. Give your children adequate time to play hard then follow it up with a calmer activity or “down time.”

6. Consider the miscellany in your life. Last, but certainly not least, factor in things like personal care, exercise, and hobbies. Perhaps you have held firm to the belief that showers happen after dinner but after looking at your newly created rhythm you realize that they would make more sense after morning outdoor play time. Maybe you have been trying to knit while the children do a craft in the afternoon but realize that dinner prep is better suited for that time while knitting can take place after dinner.

Again, this is just a very basic start to developing a rhythm but it should get you well on your way. Remember that MOST children thrive on the familiar. Their bodies, souls, spirits, and minds need rhythm. They need to know that they will go to bed around the same time every night. They need to know that they will be offered meals around the same time every day. If you are ONLY able to establish a basic rhythm, these two areas are the most important rhythmical areas to incorporate.

One tip to help young children understand what day it is, is to use different colored flags or cutouts for each day of the week. Monday is red, Tuesday is orange, and so on. You hang up the colored item in the morning and children know that green day is park day and grocery day.



If you are interested in learning more about my family’s rhythm, you can read [How Rhythm Keeps Me Sane](#) for lots of tips and tricks. The rhythm I outlined in that post is now outdated (as it has been almost one year since I wrote it), but it might help you get started outlining how your days/weeks/months/years look.