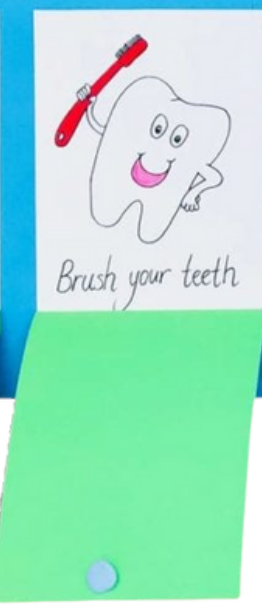


## MARIJANA'S TOP TIPS FOR ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE ROUTINES



### Why are routines important?

Routines are about how families organise their lives. They are an essential part of children's social and emotional development because:

- Routines ground children, give them structure and the sense of security.
- They allow children to thrive because routines provide environments and relationships that are predictable and accessible.
- They are important because children anchor their days according to predictable and expected interactions with their families which make them feel safe.
- Routines can reduce challenging behaviour and help children cope with transitions better. They can also help with power struggles and improve cooperation.
- Established, regular routines can help children with self-regulation skills - the building blocks of good mental health.
- Finally, routines are important for adults too, as they can help parents to be more organised, reduce stress and have fun.

### When to have routines?

Think about your daily lives and reflect on when during a day your life with children feels hectic and stressed. Most parents would say that mornings, mealtimes, bedtime, and time after school are particularly hard – getting children to eat, ensuring that they are ready for school on time and putting them to bed seem to be pushing most of our buttons! Solution? Consider establishing a predictable and accessible routine to address any stress points during the day.

## Top tips for effective routines...

**Only change one aspect of your family life at a time:** it really doesn't matter which aspect you pick first. Some families choose the most challenging, some go with the most frequent stress point – don't try to change too much too soon.

**Decide on your “red-lines”:** what are your non-negotiables? For example, going to school and brushing teeth are not negotiable in my family.

**Give your children choices to meet their need to feel significant:** We don't negotiate about brushing teeth but children can choose to brush teeth before or after they get dressed. They can also choose whether we are walking or scooting to school.

**Have a visible routine chart for every child in the family:** these charts should include steps that your child needs to take to complete the routine (for example, brush teeth, get dressed, eat breakfast, put shoes and coat on etc) that have been agreed with the child in advance. Some children prefer pictures instead of words on their charts. But they all like to have some fun included on their routine charts so make sure you plan for that too. Also remember to offer choices: steps on the chart are the “red lines” but how they are done can be negotiable. Encourage children to look at their charts at relevant times and help them to follow the routine (“What is the next thing on your chart?”)

**Role-play using the chart before using it “in real life”:** you can use your children's toys for this or do it with your children. Simply, pretend that you are a child and doesn't know what to do in the morning. Ask your child to be the parent and to encourage you to follow the routine chart. You can then swap roles if you like.

**Use the chart for a couple of months:** using the chart consistently for 6-8 weeks will help your child develop a habit and the chart won't be needed afterwards. During this time of training, you might have to tweak the chart occasionally as children sometimes get bored with it. All you need to do is allow some small changes to make it a bit more interesting for your child (for example, swapping the order in which things are done or inserting a small burst of a fun activity in between steps).



When your children resist the routine (and the chart), try to refrain from getting into arguments with them because that will most likely lead you down the “power struggle” path – this very rarely ends well. Instead, use humour to defuse situations. For example, be playful and challenge your children to a race – who will get first to the bathroom? If they are still refusing to cooperate, validate their feelings, connect, allow space and time for their emotions to come out and then gently lead them through the routine. Above all, remember to be kind to both you and your children – you are all attempting something new and it takes time and effort for it to work.