

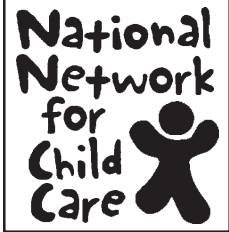


CHILD CARE CENTER

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CONNECTIONS

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Encouraging Children’s Natural and Self-Motivated Learning*

The ordinary home is full of rich learning experiences. It offers opportunities for children to learn to care for themselves, work with others, and get along in the world. Many child care centers and kindergarten classrooms try to offer a home-like atmosphere by adding rocking chairs and soft pillows, helping children learn chores such as sweeping, polishing shoes, and doing cooking projects. But they rarely match the “family feel” of a real home.

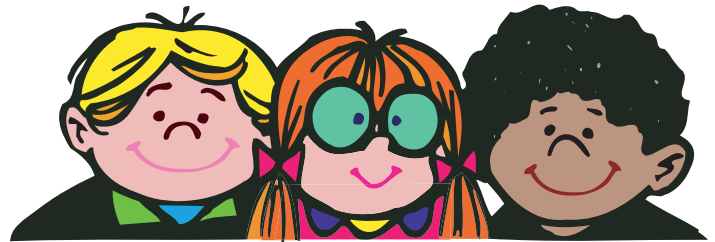
Routines are those necessary care activities that all children require— dressing, feeding, napping, toileting, and washing hands. Some people view these times as too commonplace for any learning to occur. But in fact, children learn from everything, and they are learning all the time. Because routines are a part of living, they are natural times for learning.



What do children learn in routines? In most cases, they learn language by talking about what they’re doing and listening to directions. They learn about orderliness and personal responsibility. When they gain new skills and do things themselves, they learn about success. Most of all, they learn they are cared about.

Here are some examples of the learning that occurs during routines:

Activity	Concepts & Skills Learned
Setting the table	Numbers, colors, textures, left and right
Eating	Feeding self, pouring, talking and listening, foods
Toileting and washing hands	Health habits, clean and dirty
Napping	Relaxing, feeling of security
Greeting upon arrival	Feeling of value
Putting things in a special place	Taking care of personal belongings
Preparing snacks	Helping, eye-hand coordination



Learning through Household Tasks

In addition to caring for children, you have the job of managing and cleaning the house. If you do these chores during the day, you can involve children and provide real-life learning experiences for them. You may find that you have to explain things often, slow down, and give children more time. As a result, household tasks often take longer when children are helping. But it’s worth the effort, and children feel good about the tasks they learn. Here are some examples of learning that occur during household tasks:

Task	Concept Learned
Washing dishes	Sorting, small muscle skills, breakable and unbreakable, pouring, hot and cold, wet and dry
Making beds	Folding, smoothing, spreading, textures, colors
Dusting	Names of furniture and objects, parts of things, small muscle skills
Sweeping	Large muscle skills, cause and effect
Sorting and folding laundry	Textures, colors, shapes, names of clothing and objects
Raking leaves	Colors, large muscle skills, changes and seasons
Gardening	Seeds and growth, living and dead, textures, colors, watering, digging, weeding

Cooking Activities



Children often take food for granted. Usually they have only a vague idea about how it is prepared and know nothing about where it comes from other than the supermarket. Because cooking is a part of the home, it offers a natural learning experience. You can involve children in making a snack or cooking

a dish for a meal, or you can schedule a special activity in the morning or afternoon for making things like cookies or bread. Here are suggestions for planning cooking activities with children:

- Plan activities that are appropriate for the ages of children involved.
- Observe safety precautions when using electrical appliances, hot stoves, knives, and similar items around children.
- Establish ground rules such as washing hands before starting and not putting a spoon back into food after using it for tasting.
- Plan the activity carefully in advance. Make sure you have the necessary ingredients and equipment on hand. Decide which parts you must do and which parts children can help with.
- Give children plenty of chances to be involved, and give them tasks that match their abilities.
- Children can do such things as scoop and measure flour, stir batter, and grease pans. They can knead and roll out dough, cut out biscuits or cookies, and brush melted butter on pastries.
- They can spread peanut butter on bread and wash vegetables.
- Take time to involve children's senses. Have them smell the vinegar, taste the cheese, feel the prunes, and listen to the whirr of the eggbeater.

- Observe and talk about the changes that take place when you cook foods. For example, bread dough rises in a warm place; biscuits turn brown in the oven; eggs become solid when cooked; fresh spinach turns limp and shrinks; sugar dissolves in water; and water turns solid when it freezes. What you're really doing is teaching science.
- Introduce children to new foods such as figs and kumquats. Have them compare and taste different kinds of one food—fresh apricots, canned apricots, and dried apricots, for example, or Rome apples, Golden Delicious apples, and Granny Smith apples.
- Talk about where food comes from—milk from a cow, eggs from a chicken, oranges from trees, and flour from wheat, for example. Find pictures in books and magazines to help children understand.
- Teach children not to waste or destroy food.

Nature Activities

Whether you realize it or not, your patio or yard is an excellent science laboratory for children. At your fingertips are opportunities for teaching about plants, insects, birds, water, rocks, weather, and seasons.



Of course, you can also help children learn about nature and science indoors. For example, children can watch seeds sprout in glass containers, water indoor plants, care for a goldfish or hamster, and compare leaves or shells.

Here are some suggestions for planning nature experiences with children:

- Check your yard to make sure you have no poisonous plants or other safety hazards. Call your county Extension office to check on any plants you are not sure about.
- Choose activities that involve children's senses. Have them feel different textures of rocks and leaves, smell flowers and crushed leaves, and listen to crickets and birds.
- Provide activities that children can do themselves such as finding certain kinds of



rocks, watering plants, and comparing shapes of leaves. Give them plenty of time to examine and explore the items.

- Talk with children about what they see and experience. Ask questions to stimulate their thinking. Have them make predictions. “What will happen if we put this plant inside the house?” “What will happen to this water puddle if it gets really cold tonight?”
- If children ask you things you don’t know or are unsure of, tell them that and try to find the answer by looking in a book or calling the library. Avoid giving incorrect information or keeping myths alive. For example, don’t tell children that frogs make warts.
- Help children learn to protect natural resources. For example, discourage them from picking wildflowers so they will grow again next year, and have children turn off the water hose when they are not using it.
- If children seem especially interested in something, provide additional activities on the same topic. For example, you may find magazine pictures of flowers or mount leaves between sheets of waxed paper. You may read a book or watch a television program about insects.

Field Trips

Depending on where you live, your neighborhood can be a source of learning experiences for children. You may have a neighbor who makes quilts or raises tomatoes.

Your block may have a number of unusual trees or houses. Or you may live near a church, school, park, restaurant, library, post office, or grocery store. By walking with children to visit one of these places, you expand children’s horizons.



A visit away from home for the purpose of learning is a field trip. Field trips often require more planning and preparation than other activities. It also may require more adult supervision, depending on the number of children and their ages.

Regardless of whether you walk or drive, field trips require signed permission from parents. Many family day care

providers get parents’ permission for field trips when they first accept children for care. You may require parents to fill out an enrollment form which contains a space for them to give their permission for field trips.

Here are some tips for planning short field trips in the neighborhood:

- In selecting a site, think about the possibilities it offers for learning. Would the trip really be a new experience for children? Can the children get close enough to see and feel things? Is the site safe for children?
- Consider whether you can take all the children. Will you need a friend to go along or stay home with the youngest children? Are children secure enough to leave your home and go to a strange place?
- If you choose to walk to the site, think about the route you will take. How can you avoid hazards?
- How can you keep children from getting overheated, wet, or cold?
- If you choose to drive, be sure you have enough car safety seats or seat belts for all the children. Check with your insurance agent to make sure your car liability insurance is up-to-date.
- Choose a time when the site will not be crowded.
- Depending on where you go, you should plan to stay only about 20 or 30 minutes without hurrying children. You may be able to stay an hour or so at a park.
- If necessary, call in advance to get permission from the owner or proprietor. Explain which day you want to come, the time you will arrive and leave, how old the children are, and what you expect them to learn. Find out about restrooms and water fountains.
- At least a week in advance, inform parents about the trip (where you are going, when, who is going, and whether you will go on foot or by car or bus). While you are gone, post a note on the door in case parents drop by unexpectedly.
- Prepare an emergency bag with extra underwear, tissues, washcloth, water canteen, bandages, money (for telephone calls or drinks), umbrella,



and similar items. Be sure to take folders containing parents' permission for you to get emergency medical treatment for the children. (The enrollment form parents signed giving permission for field trips also contains space for them to authorize emergency medical care.)

- Assemble any supplies you will need on the trip. For example, you can take a plastic bag to carry leaves and other treasures. Take a notepad, camera, or tape recorder to record your observations. You may need a picnic lunch or snack.
- On the day of the trip, review safety rules with the children. To help them understand, you might role play a situation such as crossing the street, walking instead of running, and staying together in a group.
- Right before leaving, take children to the bathroom.
- During the trip, talk with children about what is happening. Ask questions and point out things of interest.
- Count the children frequently to make sure all are with you.
- After the trip, encourage the children to talk about what they saw and did. Let them play with things they collected on the trip. Plan activities related to the trip.
- Write a thank-you note to the owner or proprietor and your neighbor for helping care for the children. Have children stamp their fingerprints on the card.

*Source: *The Child Care Provider Program: Training for Family Day Homes & Licensed Facilities*. Texas Cooperative Extension, Texas A&M System, 2002. Project Director: Linda Ladd, Ph.D.

Helpful Websites/Resources

Field Trips

Massachusetts Office of Child Care Services

Go to: <http://www.qualitychildcare.org/>. Scroll down the page to "Field Trips Handout." Click on the link to download the PDF document, or go directly to the URL at www.qualitychildcare.org/pdf/TAFieldTripsHandout.pdf.

Safety and Field Trips

<http://www.nncc.org/Health/fieldtrips.html>

This is a useful article that suggests ways to ensure that field trips are appropriate, safe, and enjoyable for adults and children.

Kids Earth and Sky

<http://www.earthsky.org/kids/>

This is a good website for teaching children scientific concepts in a fun way.

A Head Start on Science

<http://www.csulb.edu/~sci4kids/activity.htm>

A Head Start-funded website with information for parents and professionals, including step-by-step instructions on how to complete scientific experiments with their children.

Kids a Cookin'

<http://www.kidsacookin.com/>

This website contains information on cooking and nutrition for kids, parents/caregivers, and educators. It

includes recipes, tips and techniques, and cooking terms.

Seaworld/Busch Gardens Animals

<http://www.seaworld.org/index.asp>

This website contains fun and useful information for teaching young children about various animals. Ideas for creative classroom activities are included.

Crayola

<http://www.crayola.com/>

Crayola.com is a great website that provides kids, parents, and early childhood educators with suggestions for fun and creative activities.

National Geographic for Kids

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/kids/index.html>

National Geographic's website contains great ideas for activities that can be done with children to help them learn more about the world they live in.

Child Care Center Connections Editorial Staff Texas AgriLife Extension Service

Stephen Green, Ph.D.
Managing Editor
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Design Editor