

*A Clinical Treatment Guide to 10 Common Pediatric Behavioral Problems*

# Morning Routine for School Days



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## Morning routine for school days

### 1. *Get your child up at a consistent time.*

In many cases, children who are difficult to awaken in the morning have an inconsistent bedtime schedule. It is possible that a consistent time schedule for going to bed is all that is needed. If going to bed on time is a problem area in and of itself, then you may need to address this problem area first. Ask your physician for the following advice form: Going to bed on time.

### 2. *A gradual awake procedure may be needed.*

Some children just have difficulty waking up, even with a consistent bedtime schedule. Waking them up abruptly often produces behavioral problems right away. In these cases, I have recommended that a clock radio be used. The decibel level of the music can be increased gradually over a ten-minute period, thus providing a progressive awakening of your child. Inform your child each night that you will set the alarm for a certain time, and the music will be very faint at first. Once the alarm goes off, you will alter the volume a “notch” every few minutes. After several changes in the volume, your child will be expected to get up and turn off the clock radio. This procedure should eventually teach your child to get out of bed with the lower decibel levels of music.

### 3. *Keep the same schedule of activities.*

Some parents who have difficulty with their child on school days do not have a predictable morning routine. Unfortunately, they allow their child much discretion on what tasks get performed at what times. The result is chaos in the morning! In order for your child to learn a routine for school days, you must develop one. The routine should be invariant until your child is demonstrating the ability to perform the routine without a problem. I would suggest that you print the specific morning activities on a page taped to the child’s bathroom wall, for easy reference.

### 4. *Bathroom activities first.*

I recommend that the first walk in the morning should be to the bathroom. Teach your child that this process of going to the bathroom first is adhered to each morning. If you have several children you will need to “play” with the scheduling problem. You should have a specific list of activities that needs to be completed in the bathroom (posted if

necessary). While in the bathroom s/he takes care of all the activities proscribed for that room, e.g., using the toilet, hand washing, brushing teeth, etc. Once your child has successfully completed all the requirements, s/he leaves the bathroom and heads for the bedroom. The same process is carried out, i.e., take care of all the morning activities for that room before leaving the bedroom. Note that this sequence of events does not allow your child to go watch TV, until she is “ready for school.” Take away (i.e., remove) the opportunity to play, until all the necessary activities have been completed.

*5. Do not allow your child to engage in a competing activity (e.g., TV watching).*

Your child should not be allowed access to the TV or play station until everything that needs to be taken care of has been. This seems obvious but you would be surprised how often this occurs. It is often the case that a child (who has difficulty) is placed in front of the TV “to wake-up.” Other parents use the TV as an interim event to entertain their child until they are ready to deal with them. Realize that this creates a problem when it is time to switch from a pleasurable activity (TV watching) to a markedly less pleasurable activity (getting ready for school). This switching of activities often develops the conditions for tantrums and fights in the morning. Instead of having them watch TV first, use it as the outcome for finishing all tasks on time (see below).

*6. Once your child has performed all the activities except eating, then s/he eats breakfast.*

A good plan is to structure a really tasty breakfast if your child gets all the morning activities done by a designated time in the morning. If they are tardy and procrastinate they may only get toast, particularly since you had to help them get ready instead of making an elaborate breakfast. Obviously, younger children will need help with some of the tasks. Identify those tasks and where on the schedule they occur. This allows your child to complete other activities independently, and getting your help where needed. Your implementation of steps 5 & 6 teach your child a valuable life lesson: work first- then play!

*7. Some lengthy activities might be scheduled for the previous night*

If the morning routine is generally hectic in your household, it might be necessary to have some of the child’s activities occur the previous night. Bathing/showering is an activity that often is conducted the night before to avoid a time crunch. Similarly, selecting and placing the clothing for the next day, as well as having all materials in the backpack can also be done the night before.



**Parent Journal of Treatment Progress:  
Morning Routine**

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