

Study: Daily routines impact childhood development

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Credit: Robert Kraft/public domain

Though maintaining consistent schedules is challenging for many parents, a new study shows it can benefit children in the long run.

The collaborative study, led by University at Albany psychologist Jennifer Weil Malatras, found that individuals who grow up with

predictable, daily routines are less likely to have time management or attention problems as adults.

Researchers surveyed 292 undergraduate students, including 157 women and 135 men. The participants were asked to rate the level of [regularity](#) in which a variety of activities and routines occurred during their childhood and adolescence. Included was mealtime and sleeping routines, time spent with extended family and friends, involvement in [extracurricular activities](#).

Their findings were published in the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*.

"While certainly preliminary, our study contributes to the understanding that regularity in daily routines may help to promote time management skills and, in turn, reduce the experience of attention difficulties in adulthood," Malatras said. "Since attention problems are associated with various negative outcomes, including academic difficulties and employment problems, these findings and future research will be useful in understanding the influence of [family stability](#) and promoting overall adjustment."

The study emphasized the importance of regularity in routines, as opposed to just frequency in which they occur. It suggests that children who know what to expect day-to-day are more likely to feel a sense of family stability than those who experience activities and routines at random.

This remains true even during major structural family changes.

In previous research, Malatras found stability in daily routines positively impacted children who experienced divorce or death of a parent, family relocation and/or changes in household composition.

"It's possible to improve the regularity of daily routines even when less feasible to alter more global aspects of family stability," Malatras said. "For example, a family going through divorce can still ensure their children have consistent bedtime routines, or participation in extracurricular activities. This may help their life still feel predicable and secure."

This study builds on a body of research initiated by UAlbany psychology professor emeritus Allen Israel. Along with Malatras and Israel, other co-authors included Karen Sokolowski, psychologist, UAlbany Counseling and Psychological Services Center and Julie Ryan '10, faculty member, Department of Clinical Psychology at William James College.

Additionally, Malatras is examining the role of daily routines on a number of other development aspects. She is preparing to release findings on the relationship between family stability, emotion regulation and social/emotional adjustment in adolescents and emerging results.

More information: Jennifer Weil Malatras et al, First things first: Family activities and routines, time management and attention, *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.appdev.2016.09.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2016.09.006)

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