

# Build children's character by setting routines

By Jacqueline Emodok

As children, we learn routines, which we grow up with and then project to the different responsibilities that we might take on as adults. The routines might be as simple as saying a prayer at bed time, brushing teeth after waking up and before bedtime or putting away school uniforms.

These help us to be organised when we start our families and interact with people at places of work. That is why it is important for parents and caregivers to introduce to children routines that will help build their character.

Dr. Ritah Nasiima, a paediatrician at Platinum Hospital in Kampala, defines routine as a series of activities a child goes through during the day.

It can include what time a child wakes up in the morning and what they are expected to do, for example, take a shower, have breakfast and eat.

She notes that children need a routine so that they can anticipate the events of the day.

"It fosters discipline in a child. It is easy for children to learn things that are done regularly," she says.

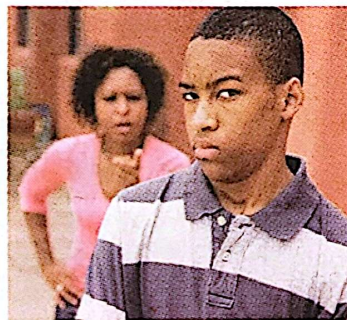
## Providing structure

Vivian Kaddu, a clinical psychologist at the American Refugee Council, says routines are a structured way of doing things and its primary benefit is mitigating anxiety.

"Uncertainty brings anxiety, but with routine, a child is able to predict what their day will be like. When a child sees their life as being predictable, they gain a sense of confidence and



Once children learn routines, parents can rest easy knowing the activities will be done even when they are not at home



Setting routines becomes difficult once children are older

security," she says.

## Start them young

Routines are most important during the attachment age of six to 18 months.

"During this time, they get attached to a primary caregiver. So if there are disruptions in routine and the people around them during this phase, they will feel insecure and develop low self-esteem," Nasiima explains.

Consequently, Nasiima adds that during this time, parents should desist from frequently changing maids or babysitters.

## How to set routines

- Come up with routines that will build your child's character, for example, washing hands after every visit to the toilet and brushing their teeth
- Set times for each routine, for example, bedtime, meal times and bath times.
- Remind your child of the routines on a daily basis and explain why they are important, especially once they start to ask
- Make sure the child's babysitter knows the routines

"When children feel secure, then the occurrence of tantrums is reduced. Tantrums are common when children are suddenly introduced to new environments or activities because they are uncomfortable," Nasiima adds.

Notably, having a routine does not mean that a child cannot explore new environments. Instead, the security that comes with a routine fosters a child's confidence, which enables them to explore new things in their environment.

"A consistent routine also brings with it consistency and mastery in how children manage their activities of daily living. This gives them a sense of accomplishment and fulfilment," Kaddu says.

She says mastery is strengthened as children grow and enables them to embrace bigger changes in their

routines, such as walking to school, instead of being dropped or helping parents buy milk from the shop.

"Young children, whose brains and functions are still developing, are not able to tell time and are equally not aware of its importance. They are guided by the events that follow through the day, especially meal times, bath times and school times, among others.

"When adults are not around, a routine enables children to be independent and govern their own life, which allows them to develop organisation skills," Kaddu adds.

For a child to reap the benefits of routines, there must be consistency. The challenge, however, is that few parents are able to be consistent and follow through.

"Inconsistencies cause confusion among children and they can react by being chaotic," Kaddu says.

## How to handle a routine

Activities should be done daily and at a set time, so children learn that there are particular times for particular activities.

Adopting a routine is not solely the child's responsibility, parents and caregivers should be actively involved in the activities.

If a child is older and the parent wishes to introduce a routine, Kaddu advises that the process should be gradual to give them time to adjust to changes.

Nasiima recommends using charts and timetables that document activities and chores that are supposed to be done at a given time.