



## CARE & NATURAL LEARNING

### Guidance for Families Home with Young Children

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**Family Rhythm:** We've all heard about the need to establish a schedule, but the traditional notion we hold about schedules is that they are rigid and fixed. The school schedule we've been following all year is not natural in many ways. It has not been designed around our individual internal needs and rhythms but has been put together for a 40 hour work week. Perhaps as we move forth into the next weeks, rather than grasping for a schedule, we can shift our perspective in search of our family's unique rhythm. As renowned play-based-educator, Teacher Tom, says in his [new video series](#) at the end of each blog, "Rhythm is something that can't be dictated." We need to be patient with ourselves and our children as we adjust to a new way of being together. A rhythm will emerge. Early childhood teachers think of the daily rhythm like a flow that breathes in and out. To think about daily rhythm like breathing, we practice noticing the balance - the give and take. Does our daily rhythm balance active and sedentary time? Togetherness and solitude? Inside time and outside time?

**Partnership:** Another way to think about balance is to consider our partnership with children. Creating a community with kids requires partnership. As adults we need to be leaders, but we also want to know our children well and design a day that fits their needs. We are seeking the middle ground. When it comes to schedules, if we are too strict and rigid children will feel that they lack autonomy and that they are being told what to do all day. If we are too loose, children will feel they have no security or predictability.

**Choices:** Giving children choices throughout the day shows children that we seek partnership. We are not just directing, we are also listening. For example, make a list of the chores you hope to accomplish during the day and rather than telling your child what to do, let her pick three jobs to cross off the list. If you haven't had time to make a list – just offer two choices, "Hey I need some help getting chores done today, would you rather put all the toys in the toy box or set the table for lunch?" We can encourage children to make their own lists of goals for the day or the week as well. Offering choices can provide children with possibilities and new ways of moving through the day. For example, if an older child is having difficulty with school work we could offer choices such as, "Maybe it would help to do your work on the porch in the sun or take a break and listen to some music for 10 minutes. What would be most helpful to you right now?" Including the children in meal and activity planning can be as elaborate or as simple as fits your style. Even building small choices into a meal like, "Do you want a banana or apple with breakfast?" will help children feel a sense of agency in their own life during this unusual time. Too many choices, on the other hand, can cause children to feel aimless and lack security. Adults who seek partnership with children find the balance that allows them to be a strong reliable leader while also practicing responsiveness and flexibility within the daily flow.

**Respect individual pace:** Humans move through the day at different paces. Some children eat quickly while others enjoy a slow leisurely lunch. If you discover that you and your child have alternating rhythms, find a way to talk about it and negotiate. If your child wakes up early and you'd rather stay in bed an extra hour, perhaps you can plan a simple breakfast the night before and teach your child how to pour their own cereal and milk before you get up. Use it as an opportunity to let your child be independent and trustworthy. On the other hand, if your child likes to sleep in and you are an early riser— think about how you can take care of yourself in the quiet morning hours. Rather than filling up your solitary time with chores and work, be sure to take time for yourself to do something you enjoy.

**Transitions:** Before shifting gears or asking someone else to change their direction, give some warning. In early childhood classrooms, we've learned the miracle of the five-more-minute-song and the magic of the clean-up-song. Giving others a little bit of time to prepare for a change is respectful, and it will go a long way in promoting cooperation. In my house I usually call out "10 minutes until dinner" and my teenagers know they need to respond with some sort of acknowledgement that they have heard me (-grunt!). When they come into the kitchen, they know they can help by setting the table or pouring the drinks for everyone. These simple patterns become part of our daily rhythm.

**Write it down:** Another idea to respect children's unique needs is to offer **place holders** by writing down your child's desires. For example, if your child isn't done playing with legos, but you really need him to come to the table for lunch, offer him a place holder by saying, "I can see you really want to keep playing legos – let's hold this place so you can come back to it." Then, write a note together that says, "Please save the legos – I want to come back and play after lunch (*use the child's words to describe his wishes*)." Put the note or sign right on the legos as a reminder and a tangible place holder. Early childhood teachers have found that when they write down children's exact words, it is a powerful way to show children we are listening. The child can often move on to the next thing if they know that we have heard them and understand their wishes and needs. Writing down children's words is a great way to develop a respectful partnership and negotiate a schedule.

Here's an [article I wrote](#) called *Co-creating Scripts with Children to Help them Feel Better*  
Here's a [5 minute talk](#) about the power of using clip boards and sticky notes with children

