



Make your daily routines R.O.C.K.!

By Lauren Lowry

Hanen SLP and Clinical Staff Writer

Wake up...have a shower...get dressed...make breakfast...pack lunchboxes...drive the kids to school...go to work...

This probably describes many peoples' morning routine. We all have a relatively predictable series of events that happen every day. While these routines may sound very ordinary, they do bring a sense of order and calm to our day. Our daily routines provide a comforting structure for us, and disruptions to these routines can actually be quite stressful (just imagine the last time you slept through your morning alarm!)

The predictable structure of daily routines is also helpful for young children on the autism spectrum. Because routines generally happen in the same way every day, their predictable steps provide an excellent opportunity for learning new things. Repetition is key for learning, and children benefit from hearing, seeing and doing the same things over and over again. When parents and caregivers use words during the repetitive steps in their daily routines, children learn the language that describes events in their everyday lives.

Since routines usually happen in the same way every time, their predictable steps provide a great opportunity for children on the autism spectrum to learn new things. Learn a key Hanen strategy you can use during your everyday routines to build your child's understanding and social communication skills.

What is a daily routine?

A daily routine is an activity you do every day in the same way. Some examples of children's daily routines include:

- Getting dressed
- Brushing teeth
- Getting ready to go outside (putting on outerwear, sunblock, shoes, etc.)
- Washing hands
- Going to the bathroom
- Snack/mealtime
- Having a bath
- Putting on pajamas
- Bedtime routine (which might involve a book, cuddles, songs, etc.)

Daily routines can be broken down into a series of steps. For example, the washing hands routine is made up of these steps:

Turn on the tap – wet hands – lather with soap – rub hands together – rinse hands – dry hands with a towel

Not only do routines have predictable steps that happen in the same order each time, but they have a clear beginning and end. Children learn to anticipate when a routine is starting, what is coming next, and when the routine is finished after they've participated in the routine several times. This structure makes daily routines a great time for learning to communicate; because the steps don't change, children can spend their energy focussing on what people are saying and on sending messages themselves.

What can children learn during daily routines?

There are many things children can learn during daily routines, including how to do some of the steps themselves and how to communicate with others during the routine. If your child is not yet familiar with what happens during the routine, it might be too difficult for them to communicate during the routine because all of their focus is going towards learning the steps. At this stage, it's best to help your child learn to do one small part of the routine on their own. Once your child is familiar with a routine and can do some of the steps, you can add in some communication. Here are some examples:

- **Learning to do a part of the routine on their own** – children can gradually learn to do some of the steps on their own. They may need some help at first, but eventually you can provide less guidance and let your child try on their own. For example, your child could learn to turn on the tap or put soap on their hands. At snack time, your child could learn to carry their plate to the table or get a spoon out of the drawer. Or when it's time to get dressed, your child could learn to pull their t-shirt down after you help them get it over their head. While they're building their understanding of these steps, they're also building their understanding of language because they are hearing you talk about the routine (e.g., "Let's get your plate," "Oh oh, I spilled the juice," "Mmmm it's yummy!" "Pull your pants up").
- **Learning to communicate during the routine** – once your child is very familiar with a routine, you might help your child communicate with you during the routine. Your child could learn to bring you their cup to ask for a drink, answer a choice question (e.g., "Would you like grapes or a banana?"), or make a comment about what's happening ("The water is cold!"). The way your child communicates during the routine depends on their stage of development, but any routine can provide opportunities for some conversation and interaction. You just need to ROCK!

Make your routines R.O.C.K.!

In the More Than Words® program, the word R.O.C.K. describes the ways we can help children communicate or do a new step during the routine. Before you use the R.O.C.K. strategy, you first have to think about what you are helping your child learn – what do you want your child to do during the routine? Do you want them to do something in the routine (e.g., pull their shirt on) or communicate (send you a message)? Once you know what you'd like your child to do during the routine, you're ready to ROCK!

R. **Repeat the steps** in the same order and **repeat what you say** during the routine – if you are consistent with what you say and do each time you do the routine, your child will learn from this repetition. You can repeat the routine with other people too – this will build your child's flexibility and give them a chance to practice communicating with others. Make sure that everyone who does the routine with your child does it the same way.

O. **Offer your child an opportunity** to do something during the routine – think about when you can give your child a chance to either do a step or send a message to you (see some of the ideas above under "What can children learn during daily routines?").

Decide when you will stop and wait during the routine (e.g., waiting after putting the shirt over your child's head, etc.)

C. **Cue your child** if they aren't sure what to do - you could try pointing to the toothbrush as a reminder to pick it up, pulling up their pants just a little bit to get them started, or holding up the towel to show them what to do next. Waiting is also a great cue – if you wait a few extra seconds, your child will likely do or say something.

K. **Keep it going and keep it fun!** – keep the routine going to the end so your child learns the order of steps in the routine. You can keep routines fun by adding bubbles or toys to bath time, or singing songs about your routine (e.g., “Brush, brush, brush your teeth, make them nice and clean...” to the tune of Row, Row, Row your Boat). Children tend to have more fun when they are involved in activities, so keep finding new ways for your child to be involved once they are ready.

Besides learning to communicate and be more independent, there are many other benefits to using daily routines as learning opportunities. When you involve your child in the routine, they become a more active participant. Children often enjoy routines more when they have an active role to play, which makes the routine more enjoyable for everyone. And one of the best reasons to use routines for learning is that you are already doing them every day! You don't need to set aside extra time to help your child learn about communicating; you can do this naturally as you interact together during these daily activities. By turning everyday moments into learning opportunities, your child will have countless chances to hear new words, send messages, and become more independent.

These ideas are based on content from [More Than Words®](#) - The Hanen Program® for Parents of Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder or Social Communication Difficulties.

About The Hanen Centre

Founded in 1975, The Hanen Centre is a Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization with a global reach. Its mission is to provide parents, caregivers, early childhood educators and speech-language pathologists with the knowledge and training they need to help young children develop the best possible language, social and literacy skills. This includes children who have or are at risk for language delays, those with developmental challenges such as autism, and those who are developing typically.

For more information, please visit www.hanen.org.

The Hanen Centre is a Registered Charitable Organization (#11895 2357 RR0001)