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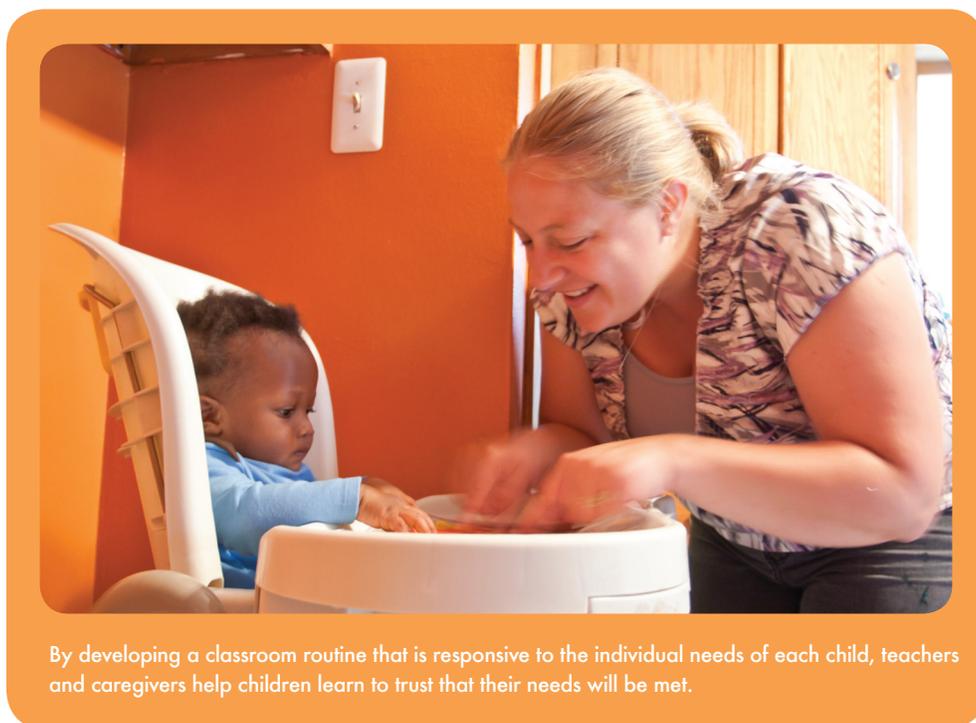
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# Building Intentional Routines for Infants and Young Toddlers

BY CHRISTINE SNYDER, HIGHSCOPE EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIALIST

Teaching any age group requires balancing a variety of expectations — these include, but are not limited to, curriculum content, the individual needs of children, expectations of parents, and licensing and accreditation requirements. In an infant classroom, children's individual needs vary so widely that it can seem challenging to create a schedule that meets all of these expectations. Developing an intentional but responsive schedule requires great care in gathering information from children's families, observing children in both their home environment and the group setting, creating a classroom schedule as a teaching team, and frequently reflecting on the routines in connection to children's rapidly changing needs.



By developing a classroom routine that is responsive to the individual needs of each child, teachers and caregivers help children learn to trust that their needs will be met.

“While there may be some commonalities, each child in a group setting will have an individual routine that varies at least slightly from those of the other children in the classroom.”

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*HighScope Extensions* is a practical resource for early childhood teachers, trainers, administrators, and child care providers. It contains useful information on the HighScope Curriculum and on HighScope's training network.

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## What Is an “Intentionally Responsive Routine”?

Simply put, implementing an intentionally responsive routine means developing a daily schedule with genuine consideration for each child's needs. The arrangement of daily events — feeding, naptime, bodily care, choice time, outside time, and group times — is in direct response to the children's biological rhythms, individual temperaments, preferences, and typical schedules at home. The order of daily events, the length of each part of the day, and the frequency of each event are determined by the unique needs of individual children. While there may be some commonalities, each child in a group setting will have an individual routine that varies at least slightly from those of the other children in the classroom. Likewise, the overall group routine for one infant room will vary from those of other infant rooms. However, each routine will contain the same components — just with a different order and frequency.

## Why Is an Intentionally Responsive Routine Important?

Creating individual routines in response to children's unique biological rhythms and needs has multiple benefits for the children, the families, and the classroom as a whole.

### Benefits for Children

During infancy, infants' brains and bodies are in a phase of rapid development. Therefore, it is essential that children have ample opportunities to rest, consume nutritious foods, and interact with a supportive and familiar caregiver. With that said, children's temperaments and varying rates of development can impact the duration,

frequency, and style in which these essential components occur. When these basic needs are met, children are more capable of developing in other areas through engagement in social interactions and exploration of their environment.

Transitioning from the familiar spaces, smells, sounds, and people at home to the newness in a group setting can be unsettling for infants and young toddlers. Having to adjust to a schedule that is drastically different from the familiar home routine can be stressful and is often unnecessary. When the classroom routine reflects the children's home routines, children are more capable of adjusting. In addition, it is easier for children to follow a routine when it is consistent each day.



Developing a routine that is consistent helps children adjust more quickly to the classroom, and with less stress.

“When you show genuine interest in their child and their parenting choices, family members feel valued and respected.”

First and foremost, when infants enter into group care, teachers must work to establish trust and attachment with each child. This is developed through careful observation of, and responses to, children’s individual needs. Infants cry to express hunger, fatigue, or a need for attention. This is their only way to communicate, and when adults respond warmly and sensitively, tending to their needs, infants learn to trust that their attempts to communicate are effective and that the adult is someone they can rely on to meet their needs. In infancy, children need to know that they can count on their caregivers to provide food, rest, and comfort. When routines are consistent between home and school, this trust can be established more quickly.

### Benefits for Families

Establishing a positive relationship with families has many benefits for children, teachers, and parents. One way to build a positive relationship with families is to find out during home visits what their routines look like at home. When you show genuine interest in their child and their parenting choices, family members feel valued and respected. This can build trust and can set the tone for a give-and-take relationship. When parents get the impression that you value their perspective, they will be more likely to be open with you and come to you with other information — such as when they are introducing new foods to their child or when the child has had a night of little sleep. As a long-term benefit, inviting the families into a conversation about meeting individual needs in the classroom sets a tone for the parents’ engagement in understanding what happens at school and advocating for their child.



Finding out from parents about their children’s schedules for eating, sleeping, and personal care can help caregivers create a schedule that is consistent with what children are used to at home.

“When the schedule matches what each child needs, it can foster valuable interactions.”

Gathering information from the families allows you to create a schedule at school that is consistent with what the children are used to at home. In addition to the benefits for the child, this can also minimize stress on family members and allow them to maintain the schedule they are used to. Bringing their child to group care can be a big adjustment for parents, too; if their child is able to follow a consistent schedule between



Creating a schedule that is responsive to each child's individual needs helps build positive relationships with both children and their family members.

both locations, that is one less adaptation for everyone involved to try to make.

Separating and reuniting can be difficult for both young children and their parents. When children can transition easily between home and classroom, it is much easier for parents to say goodbye and return later. Conversely, when expectations or routines are

different between the two environments, children can feel unsettled, which can then make other children as well as parents feel that way too. In addition, when classroom schedules are inconsistent or change frequently, parents may worry about their child getting enough to eat or sleep. A schedule that is consistent with children's home schedule helps avoid these problems. When trust is established through responsive and warm interactions, children can adjust more quickly.

### Benefits for the Classroom

Taking home schedules into consideration when creating school schedules isn't just for the benefit of the children and families — it can also have tremendously positive implications for the caregivers and for the classroom overall. When we make assumptions about what children might need, including when and for how long, the result can be stressful and chaotic. For example, expecting children to nap when the group naps, rather than based on their own personal schedules, can result in power struggles, stress on children and adults, and inadequate rest for the child.

However, when the schedule matches what each child needs, it can foster valuable interactions. When there is less stress, there are happier children and happier teachers! For example, it is unlikely that all the infants in a classroom will sleep at the exact same time for the exact same duration. This means that some children will be awake while others are sleeping. This scenario, which is different from those involving most other

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age groups, allows a unique opportunity for more one-on-one time between children and caregivers, and for interactions in small groups of two or three children per caregiver. Teachers can use this time to have more authentic interactions with children; for example, adults have more time to make bodily care routines personal and playful. Further, when teachers are able to engage with children in small groups or one-on-one, they are more capable of making specific, child-focused observations, allowing for more differentiation in lesson planning and more accurate assessment of growth and development.

### Conclusion

Creating a classroom schedule that is responsive to each child's personal schedule is essential for building positive relationships with children and families. It strengthens the attachment process while also creating a group-setting experience that allows children to feel safe, respected, and comfortable. This type of schedule can be easily developed with input from the parents, child observations from the caregivers, and intentional planning from the whole teaching team. When young children's needs are met in this way, the children are more able to build relationships with others, take initiative, and engage in learning about their environment. Strategies for creating a schedule that meets the needs of individual children as well as the group as a whole are described in this issue's "Classroom Hints" article.



A responsive classroom schedule strengthens the attachment process and helps children to feel safe, respected, and comfortable.

## CLASSROOM HINTS

# Creating a Responsive Classroom Schedule

BY CHRISTINE SNYDER

Creating a classroom schedule that meets the individual needs of each child can seem like a daunting task — but it is doable! Careful planning based on child observations and input from



parents can greatly assist in making a schedule that will meet the needs of all the children in your care. The strategies given below will help you create, implement, and evaluate your individual and classroom schedules as your children develop and grow.

### Connecting With the Home

- *Gather information from children's families.* First and foremost, it is important to find out what each child's routine is like at home. You can exchange information with family members when visiting children's homes and when families visit the classroom. Ask family members for details about their child's eating, sleeping, and bodily care routines, and how the baby communicates his needs.
- *Visit children in their natural environment.* When you observe each child with his or her parents or caregivers at home or another familiar place, you can learn a lot about how the children behave and communicate when they are tired, hungry, or need to be held. This gives you valuable insight into determining what each child needs and how to adjust the classroom schedule accordingly. Home visits are important prior to each child's first day in your program, as well as periodically throughout the year as the children grow. Home visits also help maintain positive, supportive interactions with families.

### Creating Classroom Schedules

- *Discuss individual children with your teaching team.* After you and the other teachers have made observations and gathered information from the families, it is important to discuss information about each child with the whole teaching team. This allows for sharing about how to use children's individual home routines to establish a routine in group care that includes elements such as group times, choice time, and outside time.



- *Create an overall classroom routine with your teaching team.* After information has been gathered for each child who will be in the classroom, teachers can work together to create an overall classroom routine that will meet the needs of each child while also including social experiences such as group times, choice time, and outside time. Teachers can start this process by looking for commonalities or overlaps where children might be sleeping at the same time or awake at the same time. For example, in a classroom of six infants, if three are awake from 11:00–11:30, this may be an optimal time to go outside.
- *Create primary groups based on children's needs and schedules.* After you have gotten to know each child, the assignment of primary caregivers is an important task. Children are most successful when they are paired with a teacher who has a complementary temperament. It is also helpful to compare children's individual schedules to note

components that are complementary or conflicting. For example, if four children have bottles at the exact same time every day, it may not be best for all of those children to be in the same group, as it would be hard for the primary caregiver to give all the children bottles at one time. Further, making children wait can be stressful, and can lead to children feeling a loss of trust and comfort in the group setting. Although any familiar teacher in the classroom can give children a bottle, it is most supportive of children's attachment and emotional health if the primary caregiver tends to personal tasks such as feeding, sleeping, and bodily care.



### Keeping Schedules Consistent

- *Plan teacher schedules around children's needs.* After a classroom schedule has been developed, it is time to identify opportunities for teachers to take a personal break, and also to plan for the next day. These non-contact parts of the day should occur when teachers are least likely to miss personal care components of the daily routine, such as feeding, sleeping, and bodily care — keeping in mind that what feels most personal may vary from child to child and that children's feelings about separation from their primary caregiver can vary. For one child it may be easy to fall asleep with the co-teacher but stressful to wake up and see that the primary caregiver is not present. For another child, the opposite could be true: It might feel stressful to fall asleep in the arms of someone other than the primary caregiver but easy to wake up with the co-teacher. It is recommended that a third consistent caregiver be the one to break and sub for primary caregivers, so children can establish another strong attachment with a third, consistent caregiver.
- *Post individual routines.* In order for children's needs to be met consistently, and for the children to rely on a predictable

routine, it is necessary to post the children's individual routines. Primary teachers tend to be the most intimately familiar with infants' rapidly changing needs. Posting routines allows co-teachers, assistant teachers, and substitutes to step into the classroom as needed and provide a routine similar to that to which each child is accustomed. Be sure to update this schedule frequently as each child's needs change.

- *Follow the routine but allow for flexibility.* The routine you establish is a guideline or a starting point to providing consistency and familiarity for children. However, it is equally important to remain flexible and allow for subtle changes. It is not uncommon for children's naps to vary in length from day to day, for weather conditions to impact the length of time spent outside, or for general moods and temperaments to impact engagement during choice time or group times. Be responsive to children's cues, and move on to the next part of the day, even if timing is off from the initial schedule.



- *Continue to observe children in the group setting.* After you have created the schedule, continue to observe each child for subtle cues of tiredness, hunger, and alertness, and make adjustments to your initial schedule as needed. While an infant might nap at 10 a.m. at home, the stimulation in group care might lead her to take her morning nap at 9:40 a.m. Be sure to share your observations with families, and reassure them that slight variations between home and school schedules are quite common and are due to differences in activity and stimulation.
- *Reevaluate frequently.* Infants develop quickly, and it is important to regularly evaluate whether the schedule that has been developed is continuing to match each child's changing biological needs. For example, a three-month-old will likely

have a bottle every two to three hours. Once solid food is introduced, a time labeled “snack” or “lunch” will need to be added to the schedule. The introduction of solid food may affect the timing of the bottles as well. As with the initial development of the schedule, these changes need to be made with prior communication to, and input from, the families, especially when introducing solid foods or eliminating a nap. Also keep in mind that, as children’s biological rhythms change, more similarities may be found among children’s schedules.

Using these tips for creating your classroom schedule will build relationships with families, help children feel trust and strong attachments with caregivers, and create an overall classroom atmosphere of trust and comfort.



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Infant

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View sample pages in the online store at [highscope.org](https://highscope.org).  
The book will be available May 1.

## TRAINER-TO-TRAINER

# Responsive Routines

BY CHRISTINE SNYDER



In this 90-minute workshop, participants will experience and discuss the importance of gathering all of the “pieces” of information about children’s home routines, unique needs, and communication styles in order to create a responsive classroom routine.

### *What you will need:*

- A fifty- to eighty-piece puzzle per 10 participants (split each puzzle up into two bags prior to the start of the training; you will be distributing the bags to teams, so be sure to label the bags so teams can reunite the pieces later)
- This issue’s feature article and “Classroom Hints” — one copy of each article for each participant
- Chart paper (optional)

### **Objectives**

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to

- Recognize the importance of incorporating individual schedules into creating a group routine
- Identify and practice strategies for gathering information about individual children

### **Opening Activity**

**(25 minutes)**

1. Divide participants into groups of five. Give each group a bag of puzzle pieces and instruct them to assemble the puzzle. (Keep the box with the photo tucked out of sight and avoid mentioning that each group only has half of a puzzle.)
2. As participants begin to notice that they are missing pieces, start asking them questions to provoke their thinking:
  - Why is this challenging?
  - What else do you need?
  - Why would that be helpful?
3. After all groups have realized they don’t have a whole puzzle, and they’ve had time to discuss why this is difficult and what else would have been helpful, have them set the puzzle pieces aside momentarily.
4. Ask the participants to discuss how this relates to creating schedules for infants. Be sure to address the following points:
  - In order to create daily schedules, we need to have all of the “pieces” of information about each child’s routines, unique needs, and communication styles.
  - When we have only some of the information, it can feel frustrating; or we might create a schedule that is incomplete — unintentionally leaving out a child’s need that we don’t know about.
  - Without the whole picture, it can be hard to know how each piece contributes. We need to know the components of the daily routine as well as each child’s preferences.
  - Just as every puzzle is different, the larger picture for each group of infants is going to look different from all the others. While we may have a consistent framework or concept, individual pieces and the overall schedule for a classroom will change as the needs of the children change.
5. Allow the teams with the same puzzle to work together to complete the puzzle. Point out the sense of success and happiness people feel when all the pieces come together to create the complete picture.

## Central Ideas and Practice

### (25 minutes)

6. Distribute the copies of this issue's feature article and "Classroom Hints." Have participants read each article; then ask for participants' thoughts and reactions.
7. Emphasize key points:
  - Routines in infant rooms are created by taking individual schedules into consideration.
  - Families and teachers contribute their observations of each child in creating a responsive schedule.
  - Infants grow rapidly, and it is necessary to reevaluate each child's schedule frequently.
  - This is a child-focused approach to meeting the needs of the children.

Be sure to acknowledge any participants who are feeling confused, frustrated, or uncertain about this approach. During the practice and application activities, they will have a chance to see how this process works.

8. Read Scenario 1 to the participants:  
*Max is new to the infant room. He is ten months old, so the teachers put him in the same group as the other ten-month-olds. He is only staying asleep for 20 minutes during his morning nap, and he is falling asleep during lunch.*  
Ask participants to discuss the following:
  - What information is missing?
  - Looking back at the "Classroom Hints" article, what strategy or strategies could be used by the teachers in Scenario 1 to gather more information?
 Share as a whole group.
9. Read Scenario 2 to the participants:  
*Holden has been in the infant room for six months. He is now eight months old. He is barely finishing any of his bottles and refuses to take his third nap.*  
Ask participants to discuss the following:
  - What information is missing?
  - Looking back at the "Classroom Hints" article, what strategy or strategies could be used by the teachers in Scenario 2 to gather more information about the child?
 Share as a whole group.

## Application

### (30 minutes)

10. Instruct participants to work in teaching teams, if possible. Have them begin by jotting down the routines and schedules of each child in the classroom.
11. After each teaching team has made these notes, ask them to identify how they might obtain more information — is a child new, and is more time needed to observe? Is a child new and the family hasn't yet shared with the teachers the home schedule? Has the child been enrolled for a while and the schedule needs to be adjusted? Have teams set these questions aside for discussion at a later time.
12. Have each team
  - Identify commonalities in children's schedules for eating, sleeping, and alert times.
  - Create a classroom schedule that respects individual needs but allows for social times such as choice time, group times, outside time, and mealtimes for children eating solid foods.
  - Share the schedule with the rest of the group. (If there is time, have a member from each team put the team schedule on chart paper for easier viewing and sharing.)
13. Point out that each team's schedule looks a little bit different but that there may be some similarities. Ask teams to share if there were any parts that they struggled with. Invite other participants to offer ideas that might help.

## Implementation Plan

### (10 minutes)

14. Have participants look back to the list of areas where more information might be needed for children in the class. Have them use the strategies outlined in the "Classroom Hints" article to identify how they will gather information about each child's current needs and schedule.



## ASK US

***I have a 14-month-old in my classroom whose dad wants her to take two naps each day. My thinking is that most one-year-olds only take one nap each day, and I want to make sure his daughter is ready to go to the next classroom with the other toddlers. What should I do?***

—An Infant Teacher

Family input and a strong give-and-take relationship between teachers and families is essential for a child's success and comfort in group care. At some point in the child's second year — that is, sometime between the first and second birthday — she will likely transition to taking only one nap per day. However, the transition to one nap will be most effective when the child is ready. In addition, it is often ideal for this transition to occur simultaneously at home and at school. You can let the child's dad know that in the next few months she will likely start needing only one nap. Both you and her dad can start looking for signs that the second nap may no longer be needed, such as the child showing fewer signs of being tired, taking longer to fall asleep (or not falling asleep at all), or staying awake longer. Following the child's lead in a schedule change will help the child to be more aware of her own needs and to feel supported in a group setting.



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## NEWS BRIEFS



### Remembering Phyllis Weikart 1931–2016

The world lost a truly great educator on Friday, March 11. Phyllis S. Weikart, the developer of HighScope's Education Through Movement Program,

will be remembered for her passion, vision, and compassion. A leading authority on teaching movement and dance, Phyllis never tired of helping both children and adults achieve their potential in terms of physical development, especially in terms of movement and dance. "When I talked or met with her, she was always caring, concerned, focused on others, helpful, interested, supportive, and always very stimulating," said Education Through Movement endorsed trainer Bev Boardman. Phyllis directed HighScope's Music and Movement Division for many years.

A memorial for Phyllis was held at the Clinton United Methodist Church, in Clinton, MI, on April 23. For more memories of Phyllis please visit [highscope.org](http://highscope.org).

### Professional Learning Opportunities for Summer Announced



We've added lots of new courses and workshops to our professional learning offerings for this upcoming summer. Topics include active learning, conflict resolution, scaffolding children's learning, and more — all based on HighScope's proven research and methods. Priced to fit your wallet or

your organization's budget, these courses will enhance your teaching with our expertise. Become an expert yourself as a certified HighScope teacher or trainer, or take our new Trainer Recertification Course, designed to bring previous participants of Training of Trainers (TOTs) back up to speed. Registration is open at [highscope.org/training](http://highscope.org/training).

### 2016 HighScope Catalog Coming in May Features New Products

Look for our newly designed catalog to arrive in mailboxes in mid-May. We're proud to offer new books, revised editions, and e-books.

These great preschool resources are now available in the online store at [highscope.org](http://highscope.org):

- *Arts Smart: The Creative Arts in Preschool*
- *You Can't Come to My Birthday Party! Conflict Resolution With Young Children*, second edition (e-book coming soon!)
- *Essentials of Active Learning in Preschool*, second edition, e-book
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Look for an expanded selection of resources for working with infants and toddlers — these products will be available soon at [highscope.org](http://highscope.org).

- *Lesson Plans for a Strong Start: The First 30 Days for Infants*
- Toddler classroom area signs
- Infant-toddler song book

### Look for Us at These Upcoming Conferences!

**May 9–12:** HighScope International Conference, Detroit, MI

**May 16–20:** National Head Start, Nashville, TN

**June 1–3:** CEELO 2016 Roundtable, Baltimore, MD

**June 5–8:** NAEYC PDI, Baltimore, MD