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## From the Playroom

### Routines and Structure

The beginning of another school year has come and gone. By now, most children are settled into the routines and the expectations of a new teacher and a new classroom. With each new school year, comes a reminder of the importance of routines and structure in the lives of children. Routines and structure provide a sense of predictability for children and elementary schools are instrumental settings where structure and routines are modeled.

This edition of *From the Playroom* looks at routines and structure in Primary Project programs from a variety of viewpoints. We remind ourselves of the importance of the routine and structure inherent in screening, selection, and evaluation. By screening children systematically, you make informed, data driven decisions that can guide your thinking about which programs or interventions might best support children’s social and emotional needs. Will the child benefit from Primary Project, or is there another suitable intervention that might serve the child? Using data to inform child and program decisions is both a routine and structure that will be critical to your program’s sustainability. In the “accountability” climate of schools, showing that your program is effective is vital, as highlighted by a contribution in this edition from a Primary Project program evaluator in our Washington D.C. sites.



Read on about the importance of structuring the actual play session as a way to facilitate emotional safety. Remind parents about the importance of routine and structure by distributing *Bringing the Lessons Home*. And finally, establish a few routines and set structures for your own team this school year, and watch what develops!

# Structure in the Playroom

I like both structure and spontaneity. I like being focused and organized as well as creative and playful. If you follow a non-directive play approach in your play sessions, you are well aware of the importance of routine and structure for young children. Establishing routines and structure help children feel safe and competent. In fact, we all feel more comfortable when we know what to expect and what is expected of us.

Having structure in the playroom, classroom, and at home, helps promote safety and security. Children need the help of important adults in their lives to provide structure in many ways. Predictable settings translate into comfort. This is especially important for those children whose lives are in transition or are chaotic.

Structure in Primary Project is shown in several ways, including the purposeful selection of the toys for the play space, how we begin and end sessions, and how we set limits on children's behavior. Structure and routine is modeled by coming for the child on the same day and time each week. This important act reinforces consistency and constancy, two important variables for children's emotional safety and security.

One of the basic structuring skills taught in learning child centered play is the skill of beginning and ending the session. "You can play with the toys in here in most anyway you want" signals that the time together has begun and that there may be limits if the need arises. Conversely, letting a child know that time is almost up, in five or two minute increments, is a way of guiding the child that a transition is about to occur.

As someone who has studied the work of Fred Rogers, I am reminded of the many wise ways his show used structure and routines to teach. Every TV show, Mr. Rogers walked in and put on the famous red cardigan sweater and sneakers. The importance of beginning and ending in a predictable way were characterized by his ritual transition from work to play, outside to inside. For me, Mr. Rogers valued the importance of predictability for young children.

There are wonderful books filled with Fred Rogers's quotes and his view of children...and as another year starts in Primary Project, I leave you with one of my favorites...

*"When I was very young, most of my childhood heroes wore capes, flew through the air, or picked up buildings with one arm. They were spectacular and got a lot of attention. But as I grew, my heroes changed, so that now I can honestly say that anyone who does anything to help a child is a hero to me."* –FRED ROGERS

*–Mary Anne Peabody, LCSW, RPT-S  
Director of Primary Project  
Children's Institute*

# The Cardinal Sings



In August I joined the family and friends of Mary Anne Trost for a service in memory of the 103 years of her life. Mary Anne was a school social worker with a passion. She knew that she wasn't able to meet the needs of all of the children in the school where she worked... Maybe, just maybe, there was another way! The other way became her passion, Primary Project. Mary Anne understood the concept of collaboration before the word was popular. With others, she grew the project.

Mary Anne had an idea. She understood that you need more than idea to make something last. So here I am, 54 years later, having spent nearly three decades of my professional life committed to that idea. Additionally, we have used data to understand, refine, and grow Primary Project around the world.

Listening to Mary Anne's family reflect on a woman with an idea and a passion touched my heart, and makes me even more committed in finding ways to make a difference in the lives of children. In line with this, we need to be diligent about understanding how children benefit from Primary Project.

So, as you move forward this year, I urge you to remain passionate about children and commit to following best practices. Use data-based decision making, review the rubric, and spend quality time with your team.

Mary Anne Trost started a movement in the 1950's...now it is time for another Mary Anne to lead Primary Project. Both passionate about doing what is right for children, about play, about prevention, and about collaboration.

**Please join me in welcoming Mary Anne Peabody as the new Director of Primary Project!** I can think of no one better to lead the program.

Have a great year and let's work together to make a difference.

*–Deborah Johnson  
Director of National Services*

# Program Evaluation:

## **Continuous improvement through national certification**

A school does not become a Primary Project certified program by enrolling in a workshop, renaming existing practices, or taking a pledge. A school becomes a Primary Project certified site when the team aligns their way of operating with best practices. Only then is it possible to determine the impact of those practices on the learning of both students and adults. The Primary Project national certification process does not offer a short cut to program improvement. It isn't a recipe, and in fact, it translates into hard, but meaningful work. A school's staff must focus on learning together, working collaboratively on matters related to social and emotional health, screening, selection, training, supervision, and evaluation. By adhering to the core components, especially data driven practices, a team holds itself accountable for the kind of results that fuel continual improvement. When teams do the hard work necessary to implement these practices, their collective ability to help students grow emotionally and achieve academically inevitably will rise. The sustainability of a Primary Project program in any school will depend on the collective capacity, commitment, and persistence of the professionals working within it.

*“The goal is to transform data into information and information into insight.”*

*–Carly Fiorina*

*“Enjoy the little things, for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things”*

*–Robert Brault*

## Why Evaluate?

In tough economic times, program effectiveness is critical. It can be challenging to secure funding sources for programs year after year, especially during times of financial distress. However, collecting data and disseminating the program's positive results to important stakeholders can strengthen the argument for the continuation of a program. Individuals may be more likely to provide funding and support implementation of programs that have proven to be effective with your population.

Our program used Children's Institute's web-based data collection and management system, COMET®, to analyze program results. This tool allowed us to quickly generate the program's overall results as well as analyze differences between different groups of children. This in turn has provided our administrator with vital information regarding the program's effectiveness and has promoted data driven decision making. We are hopeful that these results will help to secure the funds necessary for the implementation of Primary Project in the 2011-2012 school year.

*–Meghan Sullivan,  
Program Evaluator, School Mental Health Program  
DC Department of Mental Health, Washington D.C*

# Bringing the Lessons Home

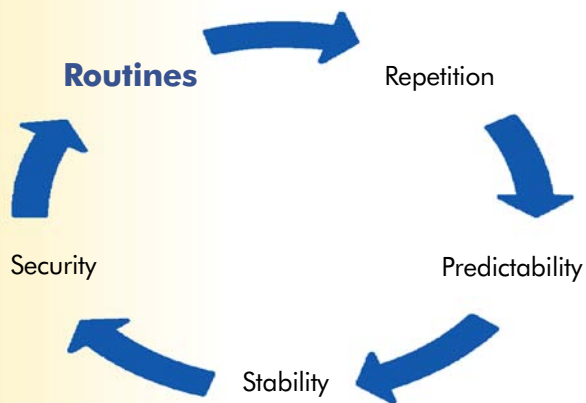


## How routines help children...

Children need and crave routines. Routines help establish security and peace in a child's life. Routines are an ideal way to keep your family and children calm, secure, and at ease with life's ever changing pace. Routines provide both children and adults with a sense of organization, stability, and comfort.

Children will thrive with schedules that are easy to understand and accomplish, yet flexible enough to occasionally change if circumstances warrant. When children know what is expected of them, they learn rules more easily.

Routines involve repetition. Repetition involves predictability. Predictability involves stability. Stability involves security. This cyclic process helps children feel safe and secure. On a very basic level, routines reassure children that their needs will be met.



More importantly, routines give children a greater gift, the sense of belonging in the family and of contributing to make the family work!

**Please feel free to copy this page and share it with Primary Project parents.**

Routines help  
establish security  
and peace in a  
child's life.





## Trayendo las Lecciones al Hogar

### Cómo las rutinas ayudan a los niños...

Los niños necesitan y ansían las rutinas. Las rutinas ayudan a establecer la seguridad y paz en la vida del niño. Las rutinas son el modo ideal para mantener a su familia y niños calmados, seguros y cómodos con el ritmo siempre cambiante de la vida. Las rutinas proveen un sentido de organización, estabilidad y confort tanto a los niños como a los adultos.

Los niños crecen bien con horarios que son fáciles de entender y cumplir, pero lo suficientemente flexible como para cambiar ocasionalmente si las circunstancias lo ameritan. Cuando los niños saben lo que se espera de ellos, ellos aprenden las reglas más fácilmente.

Las rutinas consisten de repetición. La repetición consiste de predictibilidad. La predictibilidad consiste de estabilidad. La estabilidad consiste de seguridad. Este proceso cíclico ayuda a los niños a sentirse seguros y a salvo. A un nivel muy básico, las rutinas aseguran a los niños que sus necesidades serán satisfechas.



Más importante aún, las rutinas dan a los niños un gran regalo, el sentido de pertenecer en la familia y de contribuir para que la familia funcione!

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Las rutinas ayudan a establecer la seguridad y paz en la vida del niño.

# children's institute

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EMOTIONAL HEALTH

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