

A Time to Every Purpose by Jess Bellchambers

The way a child's day is structured is an important element when considering their state of mind. Children feel safe in knowing what happens next. They become independent as they learn from the world around them but, most importantly, it is an important component for emotional regulation. Helle Heckmann writes about *the need for daily rhythm* at home and its lifelong relevance. She explains it as a breathing rhythm, where there is inhaling and exhaling. Breathing in is a time for focused experiences and breathing out is a time to rest our minds and bodies, allowing ourselves to take part in something that our body, mind and spirit needs to rejuvenate.

When a child is attending school, their day is intentionally set out with times for work, rest and play. The teacher is tuned in to the children's needs and allows short breaks during times of concentrated study. At school children are provided with inside and outside play. They sometimes work independently and other times with their peers. There's time to work collaboratively as a class or time spent reading quietly to themselves. They breathe in, they breathe out! For younger children their 'breathing in' time will be less as they have a shorter attention span. Their 'breathing in' time might be taken up with experiences such as drawing, looking at books or being read to, learning to peddle a bike or complete a puzzle.

How can we create a healthy rhythm at home for our children?

Check that all needs are being met: Physical activity, creative time, learning times, rest time, play time, alone time and times to connect with others. We need to purposely create that rhythm. A good place to start is limiting screen time to 1 hour per day. Down time should include experiences that allow the brain to relax and recharge. It is important that down times are not filled with learning tasks. For example, a walk out on an Autumn day can be used to explore and wonder and for learning opportunities around the seasons, recognising numbers on people's letter boxes or reading street signs. There is nothing wrong with these spontaneous learning experiences; however, they are not down times for the brain. Play can be used to meet many or all areas of our daily rhythm. For down time it should be purely for the child's enjoyment and child led. It is ok for the child to feel bored to start with as, when a child is bored, they have time and space to imagine through play.

The importance of play

"Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity." -Kay Redfield Jamison.

Play is vital to a child's wellbeing and development and play takes on a different role in different contexts. Play can be a way for the child to learn and inquire into new skills and concepts. Problems, worries or traumatic events can be explored and played out. Play is how children make sense of their world. It can be easy to mistake a child being entertained as a child happy and connected to their world. Children who have well developed play abilities for their age will enjoy playing by themselves without the aid of technology, as well as with a friend or their parent. Spending time playing with your child does not always come naturally and it can be hard to fit time into your day or week to play. However, a child will not judge you on your play ability. They will appreciate the special time you are giving them and look forward to it when scheduled into their routine. The time spent with your child is so important for making those healthy connections, from birth to 7 years and beyond. Children gain so much from spending time with their parent playing. This play is not for teaching, it is a time for connecting - listening to the child's questions and following their direction, making eye contact, being physically and emotionally close. Often these special play times between a parent and their child will open lines of communication and strengthen the child - parent attachment. Through play, parents are privileged to see into their child's world view as they speak through play.

Heckmann, H. (2011). Daily Rhythm at Home and its Lifelong Relevance. *The Journal for Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Care and Education*.
<https://www.waldorftoday.com/2011/11/daily-rhythm-at-home-and-its-lifelong-relevance-by-helle-heckmann/>