

Why did you put your children on a schedule?

When I was pregnant with my first baby, a good friend told me about a book she used to put her daughter on a schedule. She said that it had 1) actually worked and 2) been a wonderful experience—she felt like she knew what to expect each day, which when you are a first time mom, is very helpful! I bought the book and we read it as a couple and decided that we wanted to try it. It made sense to us that our whole family would benefit in many ways by having a predictable routine.

A key thing here is that my husband was on board with it. I think that it is CRUCIAL that both the husband and wife have talked about it and are in agreement with doing a schedule—otherwise it could be a major source of temptation and even conflict—especially in the middle of the night when one person wants to let the baby cry and the other thinks he should be fed. And it most likely won't work because one of you will always be giving in.

When did you put your children on a schedule and how did you go about doing it?

The book that I used said that you could start as soon as you came home from the hospital but I usually waited until the baby was about 3 weeks old. I think the first couple weeks are a big enough adjustment without having to think about a schedule. Those weeks to me are like the honeymoon of motherhood—it's so sweet and so short—just enjoy it!!

The method that I used was Eat, Wake, Sleep. The main thing about this is that you don't nurse or feed your baby to get them to sleep, you put your baby down for a nap or to bed while they are still awake so that they learn to settle themselves, and you try to do your feedings at the same time every day. For all of my babies, in a very short period of time (a week or two) they had learned to go sleep without any sleep "props" (rocking, nursing, bottle, pacifier, etc.) and with little or no crying. Even my fussy baby has no problem going to sleep, and is happy to be in her bed when it is naptime or bedtime.

What worked well and what didn't?

There hasn't been anything that I would say didn't work well—other than that babies are all different. Some will just fall into a schedule naturally, others you have to work harder.

You can't be a slave to your schedule. The schedule is there to serve you and your family, not for you to serve IT. It is possible to have a schedule and still be flexible.

As I said before, I think it is so important for the dad to be involved in establishing the routine. Then you are not only a team, but it allows him to lead you in making decisions about what you should do in a given situation.

How did putting your children on a schedule serve—

your children?

A schedule serves your children because they know what to expect on any given day. For an infant, when a routine is established, they are getting good sleep and are eating full regular meals (instead of snacking all day long). As they get older, I have found that for the kids to know what's coming next was so helpful—for all of us! It has also made important things routine (like Bible times in the morning, times when I read to the kids, playtime alone, family nights, game times, chores the kids do, teaching homemaking skills like cooking, etc) —things that could easily fall by the wayside if they weren't planned in advance.

your marriage?

There are a couple huge benefits that we have seen as a result of scheduling our babies. The first is that when a bedtime is established, there is time every evening carved out for us to be together. The baby goes down easily, it is predictable when she will wake up—so you know generally how much time you have together every night.

The second is that with a schedule, my husband knows generally what is going on at home each day. This better enables him to provide leadership for me during the day even though he is not here because he knows the schedule and can provide insight and follow up. The schedule is a tool that enables us to do what God has called us to do as a family more effectively.

you personally?

Having a schedule has allowed me to be more effective in the roles that God has called me to— loving my husband, caring for the kids and keeping the house—because I can plan. It has also made it easier to keep quiet times a priority. Overall, using a schedule has been a tremendous means of grace for me and for our family.

What advice would you give a mom-to-be about putting her baby on a schedule?

If you decide to use a schedule with your baby, decide in advance that you are going to stick to it even in the hardest times. Most likely it is going to require you to let your baby cry at different times. This can be hard to hear and you may be tempted to feel like you're being mean or not loving your baby if you don't get her. But if you think about it, crying is the only way babies have to communicate—if they are fed, diaper is clean and nothing is hurting them, then they are fine—they are just letting you know they are there. They are exercising their lungs. =)

This is the earliest stage of training; training your baby to go sleep on her own or to be by herself for a period of time. If you are constantly picking her up or feeding her every time she cries, you are training her to “need” you constantly.

Having said this, some babies are just fussy no matter what (I know from experience). A schedule does not guarantee perfectly happy babies because sometimes being fussy is just

part of their little personality coming out (an issue for training much later =). That doesn't mean however that a schedule won't work with this type of baby or that it's pointless to try. Like I said, even my fussy baby eats and sleeps great and is very predictable at 7 ½ months.

One more thing I will say is that there is a temptation with scheduling to rely on or trust in the schedule rather than in the Lord each day. So make sure you are first depending on the Lord for grace to fulfill your role each day—that's where your joy will come from—not from perfectly sticking to your routine. Especially because inevitably you won't be able to do it perfectly every day anyway. For me, the schedule is a guide and not a hard and fast rule. If you can think of it that way, it's not as tempting when things aren't going according to plan!

Can you describe your schedule for your babies/toddlers?

Starting off it with an infant it looks like feeding about every 3 hours from the start of one feeding to the start of the next feeding. Feed when they wake up, keep them awake for ½ hour to 45 minutes (sometimes this includes the feeding) and put them down for a nap. At night, I let them sleep as long as they wanted which usually was about 4 – 5 hours at a stretch (not longer than 5). During the day, if they were sleeping past the 3 hour mark, I woke them up. Keeping the routine during the day is what I believe really helped them to sleep through the night early on (meaning between 8-12 weeks). Sleeping through the night for a 2 month old means going about 6 hours. By 6 months, the schedule should essentially be that the baby is eating 4 times a day (breakfast, lunch, dinner and bedtime), sleeping 10-12 hours at night and taking 2 naps (morning and afternoon) that are each at least 1 ½ hours long. Before 6 months the schedule changes frequently because you are adjusting (dropping feedings and naps, adding solid foods, etc) all the time.

For toddlers, the key things for me were that he or she had a play time alone in the morning for about 45 minutes and then the nap in the afternoon which was around 3 hours (that's how long they really slept!). There is also a mid morning snack and then of course regular meal times. Another helpful thing that I read was to change activities about every ½ hour—even if it just means changing the location of play. This keeps the toddler busy and interested and cuts down on melt-downs because something isn't working or the child is bored. For play-time alone this could be in a play pen or pack-and-play or crib. I usually tried to do it somewhere other than the crib so that it wasn't associated with a nap.