

I guess you could say I started my baby schedule from day one... Sleeping, Eating, Awake Time... And it has simply evolved from there as the babies got older.

I started them out sleeping in their crib, in their room, from week one on. This not only helped me & my husband get better sleep (we weren't awakened by every little noise); but also established for the baby that this was where they were to sleep. I follow the same routine every time—turn lights down, fan on, give them a kiss, whisper 'mommy loves you' and lay them down. I am a big advocate of laying them down when still awake. At the first sign of tiredness—yawn, long blinks, etc... in to bed they go.

With our toddlers, we have continued a consistent routine—they are allowed the same blankets and stuffed animals every night—no new additions, we sing the same song or two, pray, drink of water, and good night. They've come to learn that this is how we 'do' bedtime, and this has served to cut back on most questions, wants and battles.

The schedules have evolved as my kids have gotten older. All three of my babies have been VERY different; but for the most part, have gone by the same structure. Currently, my two month old has been eating every 2-3 hours from day one. Awake for about a 1/2 hour to hour, and then sleeping for 1.5-2 hours. I try to keep her up for an hour or two before bedtime, which is at 7:30 or 8. She will go for a 5-7 hour stretch, at which point I feed and then put her back down until she wakes around 8:30 am. I 'cluster feed' at night (every 2 hours) for her last 2 or 3 feedings before she goes down for her long stretch.

Around 3 or 4 months, the schedule typically becomes—up around 7ish, with 3, 2-hour naps. Then around 6 months transitioning to 2 3-hour naps at 9 or 10 am and 2 or 3 pm. This more or less was the schedule for my first two kids until around 15 months when they gradually dropped the morning nap and started taking one 3 hour nap around 1 pm. My 2 1/2 year old still does this.

When he was two, my oldest child decided to drop his nap altogether, and thus we established 'room time'—a chunk of time in the afternoon where he was taught to play quietly in his room. (note: that 'teaching' took a few dedicated weeks from mom—a baby gate at his door, and discipline when he figured out how to climb over it). At the age of almost 5, room-time is still our practice. It has benefited us so much as he is now incredibly good at entertaining himself.

We do this for my 2 year old as well, as she is an early riser – she plays in her room for an hour or more before coming out at 7:30 am. We use an alarm clock in her room set for 7:30 am that lets her know 'room time' is over. This enables me to get time with the Lord, which I desperately need before facing the day.

Along the same time of the 'nap dropping', we started to establish a bedtime of

7:30, which continues to this day for all three kids. My 2 year old, who still takes a two hour nap could probably stay up later, but as this has always been our practice, she has learned to entertain herself in bed until falling asleep. This early bedtime has been a huge blessing for us. We have been leading a small group in the church for all our years of parenting, and I must say that having the kids down by 7:30 has enabled more effective involvement. It has also provided time for my husband and I to have uninterrupted communication... Something that doesn't really happen at dinner time!

Something that has really helped me in figuring out a rough schedule with my babies is to write everything down —what time they feed at, and when they sleep. I just keep a spiral notebook next to my bed to jot down the times. Not only does it help me remember when the last time they ate was; as they move out of newborn stage, patterns tend to emerge. You will get a general idea of what they typically 'do', and can plan accordingly.

I have sought to go about establishing schedules based on what serves the family at the time... Be it room time, going to bed early, consistent nap time, or sitting at the table until everyone is done. Identify what you envision serving the family, and "Start as you mean to go on." Establish a routine, and seek to stick to it. Kids really do thrive on structure.

Some practices will stay around; but, as babies/toddlers are ever changing, frequently evaluate whether or not things need to be adjusted. With babies, change is inevitable. It seems just when I think we've got the schedule down, baby starts teething, or hits a growth spurt, or gets a cold. I have had to learn to be flexible, hold the schedule lightly, and trust the Lord.

Something I am learning, and would encourage anyone wanting to begin scheduling or develop more structure—implement your plans out of faith not fear. I have seen this crop up often in my own life. When I am acting out of fear, I have thoughts like—this child will never learn to stay in her bed, or my baby will never sleep through the night, or my son will never eat all his dinner—and become intent on enforcing my plan regardless of circumstance. I am prone to be impatient, lacking compassion, angry when things do not go how I want, and easily discouraged. However, if I am seeking to walk the schedule out in faith—I am trusting that what I am seeking to do is for the benefit of my family; implementing in love, with graciousness; looking to the Lord for grace and strength to do so; And when things do not go how I want, trusting that the Lord is going to be faithful to help me, and is sovereign over this very change in plans.

(See daily schedule below)

**Rough Daily Schedule (4 year old, 2 year old, 2 month old)**

6-7:30 am – 2 year old up/Room Time  
6/6:30 – feed baby/put her back to bed  
7-7:30 am - Mom up/Devotions  
7:30 – 4 year old up/dressed  
7:45 – breakfast  
8:30 – feed baby/awake time  
9 – Mom shower/kids tv time/baby nap  
9:30 – Chore Time  
10-12 – Open  
11:30 – feed baby/awake time  
12:30 – lunch/baby nap  
1-3:30/4 – 2 year old nap  
1:30-2 - time with 4 year old  
2-4 – 4 year old room time/mom free time or nap  
2:30/3 – feed baby/awake time  
3:30/4 – baby nap  
4-5:30 – play outside time for 2 & 4 year old  
5:30 – feed baby/awake time  
    Make dinner  
6/6:30 – eat dinner  
7 – bath time for 2 & 4 year old  
7:30 bed time for 2 & 4 year old  
    feed baby/pajamas/bed time