

ROUTINE-BASED LEARNING

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Routine-based learning takes place as the child is *actively engaged* through the different parts of a routine. Routines are activities that follow a predictable order, are consistent, and give structure to the child's life.

There are two types of basic routines. The first types of routines are those of the *day, week, month and year*. Some examples of these include:

- *Day*: waking up, preparing to go to school, using the bathroom;
- *Week*: going to school Monday through Fridays, weekly sessions with an orientation and mobility specialist, going to Grandma's house on Saturdays;
- *Month and year*: holidays, birthdays, vacation trips.

The second types of routines are those the child follows within specific activities. Some examples include

- the routine the child follows to put away a backpack when arriving to class;
- the routine the child follows to learn which activity will occur next in the schedule; and
- the routine the child follows to get lunch from the cafeteria.

These second types of routines are critical to a child who is deaf-blind because they provide the child with the *level of detail* that they may need in order to understand, learn, plan, respond and be as independent that they can be. They function as routines within routines. For example, the steps the child follows to put away a backpack when arriving to class would be part of their classroom daily routine.

Routine-based learning is one of the best ways for children who are deaf-blind to learn because a routine is a framework in which all the parts of the learning experience have an *organized connection*, which is key for a child who is deaf-blind. Organized connection is a critical aspect of learning when the person who is deaf-blind has difficulties building concepts on their own because of sensory loss and perhaps other issues.

So routines give the *context* in which the child can learn, and build and organize their experiences. Within this "blueprint", the child learns specific skills and concepts while, at the same time, they connect these concepts through the framework provided by the routine.

The experience of learning through a routine allows the child to learn *how to learn*—a process that can then be applied to learning other skills and concepts within various contexts. Learning occurs on two levels: 1) within the routine itself and the specific tasks associated with the routine, and 2) through the process of generalization (i.e., establishing a frame of reference that can be used to learn other skills and concepts).

Routine-based learning provides the *level of concreteness* that the child may need in order to learn. Routines are hands-on, have a beginning, middle and end and, because of their consistency, can build anticipation. Additionally, they can be meaningful to the child and can allow any child—at any level of ability—to participate in all or some part of the process.

Routine based learning can also be use to *integrate* techniques, strategies, adaptations, alternative forms of communication, and curricular activities. Without this integration, a skill might otherwise be taught and learned in isolation, with little meaning to the child and to their overall understanding of how these learning experiences are connected.

The routine may be used to integrate skills and concepts in the following areas (figure 1 represents this dynamic integration):

- 1) *Adapted communication*: used by the child and the communication partner as needed in the routine to anticipate, to name, to make choices and to have a conversation about actions, people, objects, places, physical sensations and emotions;
- 2) *Tactile and/ or visual modeling*: used when learning a new action in the routine or repeating an action that has not yet been mastered;
- 3) *Adapted support and access*: used when the student needs to be physically anchored, and/or when the student requires environmental adaptations to support access;
- 4) *Orientation and mobility techniques and strategies*: used to promote independent movement and traveling within a given environment.
- 5) *Literacy*: used when the student needs codified information within the context of the routine (e.g., print or Braille labels, messages used in the community, sequences of pictures and/or objects as a schedule or “menu” of activities).
- 6) *Math and sequencing*: used to follow an ordered sequence of activities, determine relationships between elements, count, and make simple calculations.

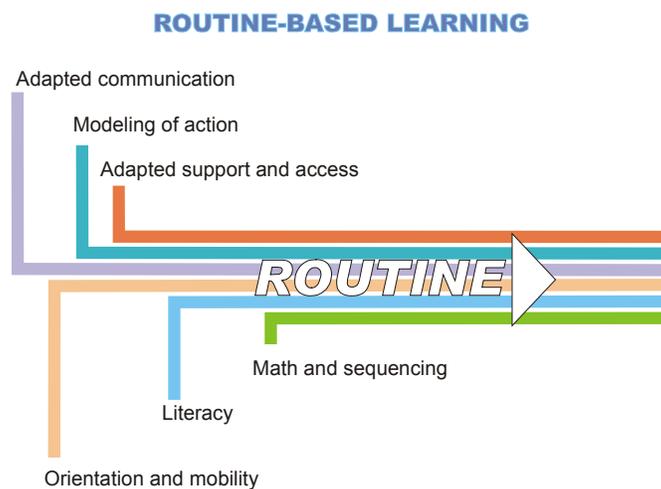


Figure 1

Routines can also *grow and change*. The child is not supposed to stay in the same routine forever. While routines represent a stable framework, they can also be modified as a result of changes in the child and/or environment. The changes may occur in different ways, such as: an increase in the length of the routine with the incorporation of more activities in which the child is involved, changes in some of the activities of the routine, increased use of alternative forms of communication, increased locations where the routine takes place.

Key points to remember:

- The level of learning in a routine is proportionate to the level of the active engagement of the child.
- A routine can be as general or detailed as the child requires. Generally speaking children who are deaf-blind need significant levels of detail in order to learn from experiences.
- A routine provides the context, the tasks, and the order on which the child can build on and connect their own experiences.
- Routines are concrete experiences that allow partial or complete participation from all children.
- A child may be able to apply the knowledge and skills learned from one experience to the routines of another.
- Routines can be used to integrate skills, concepts and adaptations in a meaningful way.
- Routines need to change as the child and their environment changes.
- All children who are deaf-blind can benefit from routine-based learning, but the results will be directly proportional to the attention of detail, effort and creativity invested by service providers and caregivers.

Online resource:

The DB-Link Info Services of the website for the National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness has a section on routines on its “Selected Topics” page. This section offers a wide variety of resources on this topic. This webpage can be found at:

<http://nationaldb.org/ISSelectTopics.php?topicCatID=39>