Routine Talk

Just a Suggestion

by Nicole Whitacre

Epidural vs. Natural Child Birth. College vs. No College. Breast-feeding vs. Bottle Feeding. Courtship vs. Dating. Child Immunizations vs. Homeopathic Medicine. Home Schooling vs. Private or Public Schooling. Birth Control vs. No Birth Control. Organic Food vs. Processed Food.

Have an opinion, anyone?

If you're a woman and you're alive, at least one of these words probably triggered a visceral response. You instinctively reached into your mental files for the appropriate legal brief, fully prepared to argue for the prosecution or the defense.

Mention a topic such as this and—cue the super-hero music please—we morph into "Super-Lawyer-Woman," ready to save the world from the risks of formula or the perils of public school or the dangers of processed food. All in a days work.

And we tend to travel in packs. Wherever we are or wherever we go in life, we find these kindred spirits—women who feel as strongly about our cause as we do—and we become fast friends. Pity the poor woman whose opinion differs from ours, or worse yet, hasn't formed an opinion. She doesn't stand a chance against "Super-Lawyer-Women."

But as comical as this image may be, it really isn't funny.

Because it's all too true. We as women are inclined to adopt a pet issue and express our opinion far too forcefully, sending other women running for cover. I'm sure I'm guilty, even more than I realize.

As D.A. Carson observes:

> "So many Christians today identify themselves with some 'single issue' (a concept drawn from politics) other than the cross, other than the gospel. It is not that they deny the gospel. If pressed, they will emphatically endorse it. But their point of self-identification, the

> focus of their minds and hearts, what occupies their interest and energy is something else" (*The Cross and Christian Ministry*, p. 63).

The fact is that all of the aforementioned topics fall into a category Scripture labels "disputable matters" (Romans 14:1, NIV): an issue that is not central to our faith or a prerequisite for fellowship in the gospel. And this entire chapter of Romans insists that we are not to "pass judgment" on these kind of matters, or, as the ESV puts it, "quarrel over opinions." Rather, we are to "welcome" or "accept" one another (v. 1), and pursue "what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (v. 19). Why? Because the person who disagrees with us is, "one for whom Christ died" (v. 15).

Here at girltalk we are going to start a little series on a "disputable matter." We are going to discuss the benefits of scheduling for infants and toddlers. We're calling it, "RoutineTalk."

And we want to set the tone for this conversation right up front. What we have to say, it's *just a suggestion*. It's merely a collection of thoughts, drawn from our personal experience and that of others. It's a recommendation, intended to serve moms with young children. And we fully expect that some will have a different opinion. That's OK! Because the gospel is what we're passionate about, what draws us together, and not a particular mothering practice.

For in the kingdom of God there shouldn't be the Whole Foods clique and the McDonalds crowd or the La Leche playgroup and the Enfamil playgroup, or the homeschooling moms versus the public-school moms.

There should just be the church. United by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Putting your baby on a schedule. It's just a suggestion.

Routine Talk

by Carolyn Mahaney

Those of you who have read my book, *Feminine Appeal*, know that when I gave birth to my first baby (Nicole), I had no clue how to care for a child and no one close by to show me how. It wasn't until my mom came from Florida to serve me after Kristin's birth (fourteen months later), that I received my first bit of helpful advice. My mom watched me spend hours trying to bottle feed Nicole to sleep—on top of caring for a newborn. "You need to let that girl cry!" she told me. It worked and it changed my world.

I know there may be moms out there like me. You feel alone, unsure of what to do, and desperate for some advice. And while I'm no substitute for a mother, I want to come alongside you (as best I can via the internet!) and simply tell you—as one of our readers put it, "Here's what worked for me." And remember, it's just a suggestion.

Having raised four children (one, twelve years after I thought I was through!), having talked to many other moms—both young and experienced, and having advised my own daughters with their small children, I've come to the following conclusion: *order, routine, and structure serve the mom, the marriage, and the children*.

Now please—if words like "order" and "structure" make you want to shut down the computer and go for a walk in the park, I understand. Or, for some of you, it might bring to mind a certain person or a certain method that was rigid, inflexible and made life miserable. That's not what this is about!

And please don't misunderstand. I am *not* saying that there is only one right way to parent. And I am *not* insisting there is one schedule that fits all babies. And I am *not* a medical expert, and I know there are unique situations in which conventional wisdom does not apply. I'm also *not* presenting anything new or novel. "Older women" for centuries—from Susanna Wesley to Catherine Beecher to Elisabeth Elliot—have passed this practical wisdom down to all of us (we'll pass it on to you over the next few days).

As we examine more closely the advantages of scheduling for you and your family, I pray you'll benefit in some small way. But whether you take my advice or not, I sincerely hope you feel my care. And most of all, I hope you know the Father's pleasure in your motherly sacrifice.

Routine Talk: For the Children

by Nicole Whitacre

"The children were always put into a regular method of living, in such things as they were capable of, from their birth." Susanna Wesley

Mom pointed out yesterday that, "Order, routine, and structure serve the mom, the marriage, and the children." I'm going to take the last part first. As I see it, a schedule serves our children in three ways:

1. **Routine teaches self-control.** Per Titus 1:8, Steve and I want our son to be self-controlled and disciplined. But he wasn't born that way! We have to train him, and it's not too early to start. By establishing a daily routine we are teaching him to do one thing for a pre-determined length of time. So, for example, Jack (who is three) is learning to sit at the table and color for twenty minutes until the timer goes off. He's not ready to sit through his SAT's yet, but by putting him on a schedule, we can teach him self-control and discipline in an age-appropriate manner.

2. **Kids Love It!** They won't tell you, but did you know that your kids *want* you to put them on a schedule? As one author notes:

> "Children need rules and consistency in their lives. In fact, they crave them. They'll do all sorts of crazy, naughty, out-of-control things just to get their parents to enforce some rules to curb their behavior. More rules that define their behavior and boundaries will actually produce more freedom to grow and blossom. Rules make children feel safe. They give children a defined world. They spare children from having to make adult decisions because adults have made the proper decisions for them."

From her childhood experience, Elisabeth Elliot concurs:

> "The regularity of our schedule was one of the things we depended on, and though we did not know it at the time, it gave us great security…Our little world could be counted on to stay the way it was, safe, 'structured,' and pretty much the same every day" (Shaping of a Christian Family, p. 77)

My own experience with Jack backs this up. He absolutely loves his schedule! He regularly rehearses out loud with me the sequence of his routine. And although he doesn't always comply perfectly, he is excited about "what's next!"

3. **Schedule facilitates effective discipline.** That's because the rules are clear—for mother and child. Kids know what you expect of them and when you expect it. So they also know when they've disobeyed and why they are being disciplined. Additionally, a regular routine can actually cut-down on (though certainly not eliminate!) discipline situations. When kids know what to anticipate, they are less likely to sinfully respond to change.

There's a progression here. The more children learn self-control, the less they'll disobey and require discipline, and the happier they—and mom—will be! But having made my simple case, please don't forget: it's just a suggestion!

Routine Talk: For the Husband

by Janelle Bradshaw

Gone are the days of spontaneous dinners out, midnight walks around the block, and sleeping in. For Mike and me, these are the days of dinners in, midnight feedings, and a lot less sleep. As many of you know, little Caly burst into our world this past February. And while our daughter has brought us more joy than we ever imagined, she has also changed our lives. As a new mom, I have been baptized into the demands of motherhood.

For all of us, there can be a tendency to become consumed with being a mom. We can easily forget that our first relational priority, according to Scripture, must be our husbands. They must always be first in our heart and our care.

How is this possible with a newborn? Granted, this can be difficult to pull off if we are rushing to hold our baby at his or her first whimper and feeding our baby whenever he or she cries. This is where the advice my mom's first pediatrician gave to her is so helpful: "Your baby should adapt to you and not you to your baby."

Enter "Schedule!" This little practice has made a huge difference as I have navigated the uncharted waters of marriage plus kiddo. Placing Caly on a schedule has provided a measure of predictability, even though she is an unpredictable baby. I generally know how our day will play out with naptimes and mealtimes. This allows me to plan specific times for Mike and me to be together. We have been able to resume our weekly date night, because I know how long I can be away from her. When Mike comes home from work in the evening, he knows that Caly has a scheduled bedtime, which gives the two of us time to catch up from the day. Although motherhood has been my biggest life adjustment, a schedule has not only served my daughter, it's helped me keep my husband first.

But once again, this schedule thing is just a suggestion.

Routine Talk: For the Mom

by Kristin Chesemore

The word “schedule” doesn’t always conjure up fun and exciting feelings for me. Sometimes it can seem easier to sort of let life happen. But I have learned—and am still learning—that this is not the case. Life without a schedule doesn’t necessarily make things easier.

Scheduling serves me. And I don’t mean that selfishly. The point of “serving me” is so that I can, in turn, better serve my husband and children. Here’s how it works in my life:

My little guys wake up “asking” (by their actions) for direction. Before I implemented a consistent schedule, each one would descend the stairs at a different time. This would change week to week—who was up first and at what time. You get the picture. Nothing consistent. Just when I thought we were in some sort of pattern, one of them would change on me.

As a result, it became difficult to have my devotional time in the morning. And yet, time in the Word is what I need to sustain me and enable me to effectively care for my boys. As John 15:5 puts it, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” Apart from my time with the Lord, I cannot be an effective mom.

I realized that I needed to come up with a plan to guard my quiet time, and then train the boys to adapt to it. So now, they know to stay in their bed until 7:00 a.m. (followed by breakfast with Dad). This means I can consistently prioritize my devotional time. And because I am abiding in the Lord, I am able to bear fruit as a mom.

It might seem obvious, but a schedule also makes it possible for me to get sufficient rest. I don’t mean exorbitant rest, but just enough. I try to get up early each morning, so when the boys go down for their nap, so do I. This midday rest gives me strength to carry on for the remainder of the day. And without a doubt, I’m a happier mom as a result.

As Nicole and Janelle explained, a schedule serves my children and my husband directly. But it also serves me. It provides the rest I need, and most of all, it affords me time with the Lord. And rest and a quiet time mean I can more joyfully and successfully serve my husband and children.

But as always, this is just a suggestion.

Routine Talk: Wake-Up Time

by Nicole Whitacre

A mom wrote:

> *I hope that a hundred people ask you this so you answer. How do you teach a toddler to stay in bed until 7:00? I have been needing the answer to this question for awhile. Please help!!*

Well, you got your wish! It wasn't quite a hundred, but several moms did write in with this question. I'm answering on Kristin's behalf because she's a little too busy keeping her kids on their schedule today. And please know, we don't think we have all the answers. We're figuring this out as we go along too. But here are some ideas that have worked for us and for people we know.

If possible, begin when your child is still in a crib (old enough to sit up on their own). Don't get them out of bed when they first wake up, but place some books or toys in the crib the night before, after they are asleep. Determine what time you will get them up and stick to it. They might cry at first, but soon they will enjoy this morning playtime. If this habit is established early, it will be easy to maintain, even after they transition to the "big boy" or "big girl" bed.

However, if your toddler is already in a bed, take heart—it is not too late. Kristin can attest to that. First of all, make it fun! Tell them they are going to have a new "special playtime" (or give it a more creative name). Consider buying a new toy or book or two that is reserved for that time. Friends of ours have an idea I haven't tried but really like: toddler devotional time. Their kids get a Bible story book and some kid worship music (try "Awesome God" or "Hide the Word") to read and listen to for a while.

Because toddlers have no concept of time, you could set a timer (as our mom did) for the number of minutes between when they wake up and when you've determined they will get up. Or, like a dad we know, you can use a light timer (which turns the light on at a pre-set time) to alert the children that it's now OK to move about the cabin, er, I mean room. Or, you could simply train them not to get out of bed until Daddy or Mommy come to get them (as we do with Jack).

And yes, it will require training and probably even some discipline to make this work. The same dad who used the light timer had a clever idea. He stood outside the door the first time, so when his daughter got out of bed and opened the door, there was Daddy! She had no way of knowing her dad wasn't always standing outside the door, and so she stayed in bed. I know another mom who sat outside the door, prepared to discipline whenever the child disobeyed. This requires some investment at first, but the payoff is well worth it. And actually, Kristin says that in her case, her boys were so used to being disciplined in other areas that it wasn't that hard!

Oh, and breakfast with Daddy (if his schedule permits) is a practice both Kristin and I appreciate. Steve is teaching Jack Bible memory verses and his catechism, and I get an extra half an hour to prepare for the day. Kristin's boys have learned to go back in their beds after breakfast and play with toys until 8:00!

Teaching your child to stay in bed serves you (the mom) so you can get a devotional time (and maybe even a shower!). It ensures your husband gets enough rest, and your attention in the morning. And it serves the children. By teaching them to rise at a certain time and to enjoy playing by themselves, you can help them form disciplined habits to last a lifetime.

But teaching your kid to stay in bed? Take it or leave it. 'Cause it's just a suggestion.

Routine Talk: For Babies

by Janelle Bradshaw

Before Yahoo shuts down our email account due to the flood of requests for us to share HOW to put a baby on a schedule, let me set your minds at ease. Over the next few days, we will be posting our specific schedules, from infancy to middle school. So stick around.

I'm up first. But before I tell you about Caly's schedule, I want to fill you in on how I arrived at this scheduling decision.

Exactly one year ago this week, I found out that I was pregnant. As soon as those two little lines showed up on the pregnancy test, my motherhood journey began. The most pressing question before me: *How do I do this mommy thing?* Sure, I spent years babysitting and caring for my little brother and nephews, but this was gonna be different. I wasn't going to give this one back at the end of the evening. She was going home with me.

The Bible doesn't tell me whether or not to use a pacifier or to let my baby cry herself to sleep; but it does tell me where I can find the answers to these—and many other—questions. Just check out Titus 2:3-5: *"Older women are…to train…the younger women…to love their children."* What wisdom is found in these words!

But where do we start? Given the endless number of methods and opinions out there, it is easy to become overwhelmed or simply ignore the advice altogether. However, neither reaction is in line with Titus 2. So how do we know who to pursue for help? How do we sift through all of the suggestions? We need to be selective. I recommend that you look for women whose children are characterized by the fruit of self-control and obedience. And when you find one, corner her. Ask her to coffee. Tell her you will pay. Bring your notepad and start writing. Don't underestimate the benefit that you will gain. You can save yourself a whole lot of heartache and trouble, simply by gleaning from the wisdom of experienced women.

For me, these conversations started close to home. I began to grill my mom and sisters. I intentionally sought out women at church. "Tell me everything! What worked? What would you do differently?"

My conversations all led me to the same conclusion—babies thrive on schedules and order. This isn't something new or novel that I discovered on my own. I'm leaning on centuries of motherhood experience here (Susanna Wesley, Elisabeth Elliot, and many others). And that brings me great comfort, especially in those moments when perseverance is required.

So, the schedule that I will be sharing over the next few days is hardly original with me. It has evolved from many conversations, and I offer it to you as—just a suggestion.

Routine Talk: For Babies, Pt. 2

by Janelle Bradshaw

Caly leads a simple life. She sleeps, she eats, and she has awake time. That's it. Her life is a constant three-hour cycle of eat/wake/sleep and in that order. And these are the building blocks of her schedule, which I've used since we arrived home from the hospital. The purpose of this schedule

is to help set Caly's internal body clock and to teach her how to fall asleep on her own.

EAT: Since birth, I have fed Caly every 2 ½ to 3 hours. Now that she is 4 months it is every 3 to 3 ½ hours. Warning! These times are not universal to all babies. I would encourage you to check with your doctor before regulating your child's eating habits. In my case, Caly was meeting all of the healthy growth charts and thriving on this particular feeding schedule.

To teach Caly the difference between day and night, I never let her sleep past her feeding time during the day. But at night, I allow her to sleep as long as she will. Now, at four months, she sleeps for a seven to nine hour stretch before she wakes up hungry.

WAKE: I work hard to give Caly awake time after she eats (the exception being her bedtime and nighttime feedings). This was especially difficult those first few weeks when she would often fall asleep nursing. But the extra effort paid off and her body quickly adapted to the pattern.

During awake periods, I give Caly some time to play alone in a safe place (for twenty minutes, or longer if she is happy). I want her to learn to entertain herself, rather than be solely dependent on the attention of others. This wasn't always met with a smile at first. But I made sure she was fed, changed, and happy before I put her down. Now, my girly has begun to enjoy "swing time" and "floor time." She plays with her fingers and talks to herself.

As I said yesterday, this advice is nothing new. In their book, *The American Home*, Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe (of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* fame) write:

> "Do not allow a child to form such habits that it will not be quiet unless tended and amused….A child who is trained to lie or sit and amuse itself, is happier than one who is carried and tended a great deal, and thus rendered restless and uneasy when not so indulged."

Of course, awake time also includes special Mommy-Caly play-time: we sing songs, talk baby girltalk, and play with toys. There is also errand-time, playgroup-time, and other fun activities. I love spending every day with my girly!

SLEEP: A nap concludes our cycle. Naps have always ranged in length from 1 to 2 hours. A priority from the start has been to teach Caly to settle

herself to sleep on her own. This has meant some tears. The first night that I let her cry herself to sleep, I cried too. Mike was in full support of my plan for training Caly, and he was there to reassure me that this was good for her--even when everything in me wanted to run and pick her up. Now, I can put Caly down to sleep with very little or no crying at all.

Eat. Wake. Sleep. It's not rocket science. But if you're still a little fuzzy, I've attached an example of what a typical day might look like for Caly. And it's not the only way to do it, either. My mom used an eat/sleep/wake cycle, but always made sure her babies were awake when she put them in the crib. I'm not going to pretend it's always easy. And yet the rewards—for Caly, for Mike, and for me are well worth the effort.

But don't you be forgetting, it's just a suggestion.

Routine Talk: For Toddlers

by Nicole Whitacre

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven." Ecclesiastes 3:1

Jack's life is not so simple as Caly's. He's a three-year-old boy. (I can see you moms of sons smiling and nodding to yourselves. You understand.) So far, he's an only child. He has no other siblings to play with. That means "Mommy" is his primary playmate and conjurer of entertainment. Jack—as much as I love him—is also a whiney child, and easily bored.

Schedule to the rescue again. The same principles that helped regulate Jack's feeding and sleeping as an infant provide order, structure, purpose, and fun to Jack's toddler days. There's "breakfast time" and "toy time" and "school time" and "video time" and "outside time" and "table time," mostly in ½ hour increments. You get the idea. And so does Jack. Recently, I took him out of the bathtub and he excitedly announced, "It's towel time!" (I guess there really is a time for EVERY matter under heaven!)

It took some effort to get his wake-time schedule up and running. I blocked out a week where I was home in the mornings and focused on moving Jack through his day. We have a timer (which has since been dunked in the bathtub) to help him know when it's time to transition to the next activity. Mom encouraged me to label each part of the day to help him understand.

There's always more tweaking and troubleshooting to do. But now that the structure is in place, I have great flexibility. I often shuffle the late-morning and afternoon activities around, depending on the day. Even if we miss a day, Jack easily slides back into his schedule the following morning.

Moms with multiple children might not need a schedule quite as intense as mine (that's why it's just a suggestion). But my three year old is a lot less whiney on a schedule. And so am I.

Routine Talk: For Multiple Children

by Kristin Chesemore

Andrew just finished kindergarten! Actually, I feel like I just finished kindergarten or Homeschool 101. The fact that Andrew can now read and that I have survived the school year with my sanity in tact is a testimony to the grace of God and my trusty little schedule.

I use my schedule as a guide and not a rigid routine. Its purpose is to serve my family; I don't feel obligated to accomplish every item on a given day. The schedule doesn't always go smoothly or perfectly, because my boys are little sinners like their mommy! But it has brought a degree of order to what would otherwise be a rowdy riotous day with a six, three, and two year old. I can't imagine doing life, much less homeschool, without it.

7:00—7:30 Breakfast with Daddy
My husband reads the Bible to them and helps my oldest son to memorize Scripture.

7:30—8:00 Back on their beds with a few toys or books

8:00—9:00 School Time
The boys play in the basement for a few minutes while I clean up breakfast and then do school with Andrew. The younger two think they are doing school too, even though they are only coloring!

9:00—9:30 Show Time
They watch a tv show.

9:30—10:00 Blanket Time for Liam and Owen
(Andrew normally reads books on the couch during this time.)
The two younger boys get a snack and a toy and sit on their special blankets. Then at the 15-minute mark I give them a different toy. These

are toys that they don't get to play with any other time of the day. I used to put their blankets side by side, but then they would throw toys from one blanket to the next or tempt each other to mischief. Since I moved their blankets to separate floors, it is working much better!

10:00—11:00 Play Outside

11:00—12:00 Chad Time
My brother comes and plays with them 3x per week. This is a wonderful blessing. I recommend that all mothers have a mother's helper if possible.

12:00—3:00 Lunch and Naps

3:00—3:45 Project Time

3:45—4:15 Stroller Time
I have been training my three year old to hold on to the stroller when we are out (rather then riding). Taking walks around the neighborhood helps me reinforce this practice.

4:15—4:30 Pick-Up Toys

4:30—5:00 Video Time

5:00 - 5:15 - Table Time with books.
I got this idea from my friend Beth when I lived in Chicago. She had her children sit quietly and read books at the end of the day. I have my boys sit at the kitchen table and give them each a different book to read. Then I set the time and finish making dinner in the kitchen right next to them. Last week, I needed more than 15 minutes, so I kept adding to the timer when they weren't looking!

5:15—7:30 Dinner and Bedtime Routine

Scheduling—and can I say, re-evaluating and scheduling again—has really served me over this past year. It has not only made homeschooling Andrew possible, but it has enabled me to get a morning devotional time and some "down time" during naps. Scheduling has helped me to be intentional and proactive, rather than reactive in training my children.

Writing this post makes me excited about my summer schedule. And it's just a suggestion, but why don't you try a summer schedule too?

Routine Talk: For School-Age Children

by Carolyn Mahaney

At the beginning of every school year and at the start of every summer holiday, I create a new schedule for Chad. Then I sit down with him and fully explain the new plan, answer all his questions, and consider any reasonable requests for modification. The schedule is ready to go. Almost. For I've learned that what looks good on paper doesn't always work in real life. Some fine-tuning is required before the schedule starts to work efficiently.

"Efficiently" typically only lasts for a couple of weeks, before more conversation is needed. The schedule is tweaked where necessary and we're back on track. Just when things are running smoothly a holiday or vacation arrives and wipes out the schedule completely. We're back to square one.

So you may be wondering: *Is a schedule really worth all the time and effort?*

Yes! For many reasons. But perhaps most importantly, it cuts down on nagging. It prods on my behalf. The schedule tells Chad exactly what he needs to do, when he needs to do it, and how long it should take to complete. As the mother of a teenage son, anything that minimizes continual reminders and non-stop commands is well worth the effort. For less nagging means there is more time for laughter, affection and special mother-son conversations.

So, instead of constant nagging, let your schedule do the talking. By now, I hope you know that it's just a suggestion.

Routine Talk: Some Concluding Remarks

by Carolyn Mahaney

As we draw this series to a close, we want to leave you with a few thoughts:

-A schedule is meant to serve, not rule. When it doesn't serve, dismiss it. Lay it aside and pick it back up later.

-A schedule must be exercised in dependence upon God. It can greatly enhance our mothering, but it can never eliminate our need for God's help.

-A schedule should be implemented humbly. We must avoid being self-righteous and judgmental in our communication about mothering practices. We must also avoid sinfully judging other women that they are being self-righteous and judgmental. In many cases they may simply be trying to help.

-A schedule is optional. You can certainly glorify God and be an effective mother without a schedule.

-A schedule is not the most important thing about us. Remember D.A. Carson's admonition:

> "So many Christians today identify themselves with some 'single issue' (a concept drawn from politics) other than the cross, other than the gospel. It is not that they deny the gospel. If pressed, they will emphatically endorse it. But their point of self-identification, the focus of their minds and hearts, what occupies their interest and energy is something else" (The Cross and Christian Ministry, p. 63)."

The gospel—and not a schedule—should always be what we're most passionate about. And this is *not* a suggestion.[*]

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