



**FOR SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN
PROVIDING STRUCTURE IS CRITICAL**



For Special Needs Children, Providing Structure is Critical

For all children structure is important but for children with special needs providing structure is essential for their learning experience. The designation “children with special needs” is for children who may have challenges which are more severe than the typical child and could possibly last a lifetime. These children will need extra support, and additional services, as well as a clearly structured home life.

Consistent routines and clear expectations – a consistent, organized, clearly defined daily plan – will help create order and add structure to your child’s day, as well as your own. Things go more smoothly when your child knows what to expect, and what is expected of them.

Even something as simple as bath time, which may not be at all simple for your child, requires a clearly defined process to make it easier for your child to learn.

Tips for Bath Time

The visual schedule below can be used to help your child understand that steps that they need to complete for bath time. As they become more independent and older the pictures can act as a reminder, which they can follow through on their own.





According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), here are important keys to creating structure for your special needs child:

- Consistency, predictability, and follow-through are important for creating structure in the home.
- Respond to your child's behavior the same way every time. When you are consistent, the behaviors you like will happen more often and problem behaviors are less likely to happen.
- Routines and daily schedules help you and your child. You both know what to expect each day. Routines can also improve your child's behavior and your relationship with your child.
- A family expectation is a clear statement about what is expected as a family. These are agreed, modelled and referred to frequently to support everyone in the family. You as a family decide there are no phones during meal times, if that is the case this expectation applies to everyone. No exception Grandpa!
- Keep things positive! Reward and praise your child for following routines and expectations. This makes it more likely that your child will follow the routines and expectations in the future.

All children need structure and limits to ensure their physical and emotional safety and security. For a child with special needs however, providing structure on a consistent basis will help them to learn more easily the tools they need to live; from the simplest to the most complex behaviours for daily survival.



About the Author

Donia Fahim, Ph.D., Cert. MRCSLT (UK), is Specialist Speech and Language Therapist, International Educational Consultant, writer and adventure traveler who has devoted her life to improving the educational and therapeutic services of young children with special needs around the world. She has worked with leading experts in the field and utilizes evidence-based practices with in-depth knowledge across disciplines.