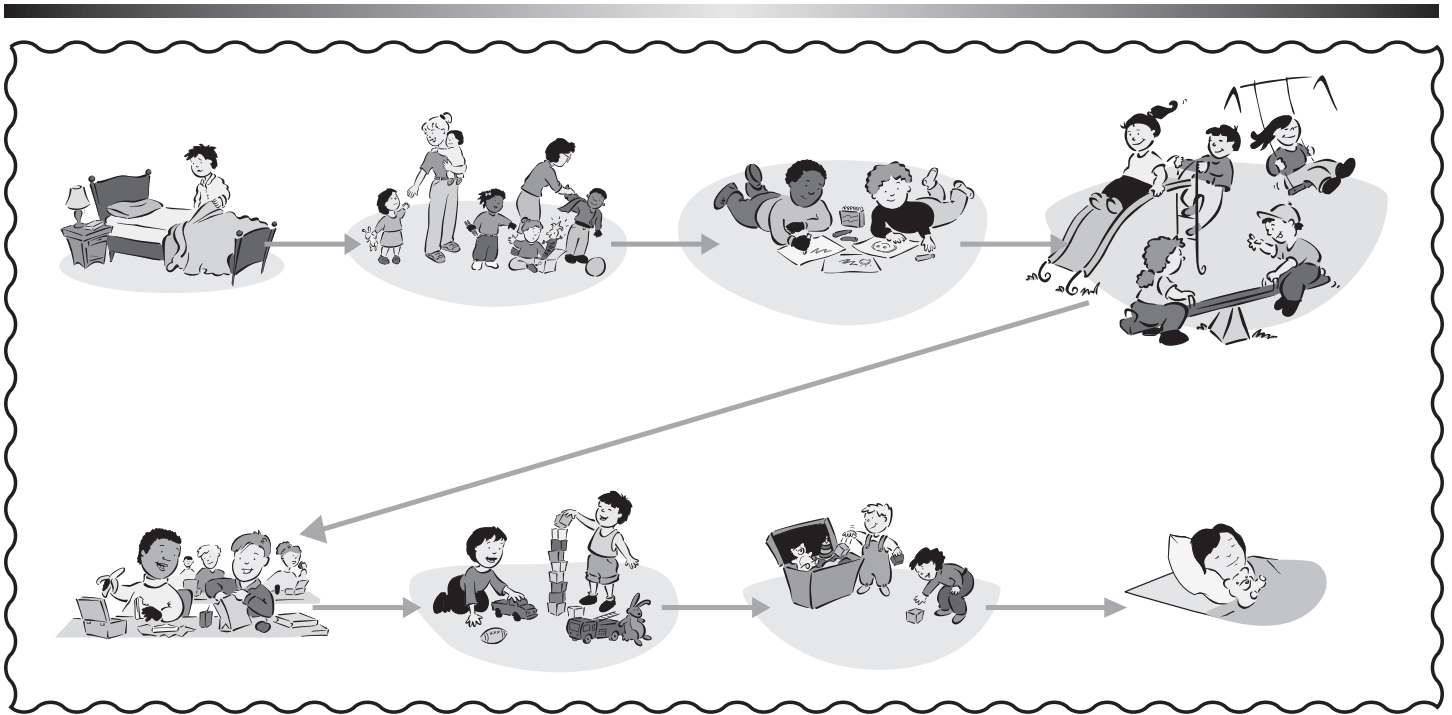




## What Does "Time" Mean to Children?



Young children do not understand the passing of time. Words like yesterday, today, tomorrow, hour, and minute are meaningless. This can be frustrating for children and their parents. Because children don't understand time, they find it hard to understand what it means when we say, "You can go outside in an hour." It makes no sense to them that they can't do what they want to do when they want to do it.

Help young children learn about the passage of time by setting up a regular daily routine. Give children snacks and meals and rest on a regular schedule so that they don't become too hungry or too tired. Tired and hungry kids are more likely to misbehave, so a regular schedule helps kids behave their best. Children feel more secure with a regular routine. They predict what will happen next, and through this they begin to learn about the passage of time.

### Changes Are Hard

Have you ever felt frustrated when you were involved in a task and told to stop? Children feel the same way when we tell them to stop playing and get ready for a bath or bedtime. They don't want to stop playing when they are having fun.

Discipline problems are common when children need to change from one activity to another.

You can avoid a lot of these problems by giving children a warning that they will need to stop in five minutes. While young children do not understand the meaning of "five minutes," they soon learn that it means change is coming up. Let children know what is coming next. You might say, "It will be bedtime in five minutes. You can choose two stories to read before we turn out the light." When children have something to look forward to, it helps them finish up more easily. Ask children, "What are you going to do to finish your play?" Giving them time to finish up will make them more cooperative.

Warn children of any changes in your routine before they are going to happen. "Tonight we are going to Grandma's for dinner so we won't go home after child care, and there won't be time to play when we get home. It will be time for you to have a bath and story and then bed." By letting your child know what the new routine is you help build their flexibility. Children are much more accepting of changes that they know are coming.



## Dinner Conversations

Dinner is a great time to reconnect with your children. Take a few minutes before you take your child home from child care to find out what she did that day, and then ask about it at dinner time. This gives you some interesting things to talk about as well as the chance to introduce words like before, after, next, yesterday, today, tomorrow, day, and night.

## Read Books about Time

Reading books to children is a great way to help them learn. Look in your local library for the following books to read to your child to help him learn more about time:

[A Second Is a Hiccup](#), by Hazel Hutchins, Scholastic, Inc. 2004

[Before I Was Your Mother](#), by Kathryn Lasky, Harcourt Children's Books, 2003

[Planting a Rainbow](#), by Lois Ehlert, Voyager Books, 1988.

[Steam, Smoke and Steel, Back in Time with Trains](#), by Patrick O'Brien, Charlesbridge Publishing, 2000

[The Carrot Seed](#), by Ruth Kraus. HarperCollins, 1945

[The Quilt Story](#), by Tony Johnston, G.P. Putnam, 1985



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