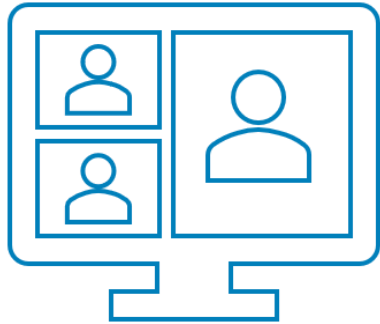




## Creating Routines for Smoother Shifts

# INTRODUCTIONS

## Today's Facilitators



## PAL Participants

Please introduce yourself in the **chat**:

- Your **NAME**
- **Shelter where you volunteer**

# GOALS FOR THIS TRAINING

***We hope you'll leave this session prepared to ...***

- Understand why group routines matter
- Recognize what group routines look like in the Playspace
- Identify your role as a volunteer in supporting routines
- Learn why consistency is important for children's well-being
- Explore strategies to help routines run smoothly

# Shared Practices



## Safety First

- *We create spaces where children feel physically and emotionally safe.*

## Consistency & Predictability

- *We offer consistent schedules, clear communication, and stable relationships.*

## Collaboration & Shared Ownership

- *Shelter staff, Horizons staff, and PALs work together to build and maintain healing environments.*

## Empathy & Understanding

- *We approach children & families with empathy, recognizing that behaviors often reflect traumatic experiences.*

## Empowerment & Voice

- *We respect the voices and choices of children & families whenever possible to promote autonomy and self-confidence. This is critical for children impacted by trauma.*

## Cultural Humility & Respect

- *We honor the diverse backgrounds & strengths of the children & families we serve.*

# Why Group Routines Matter



Group routines provide structure and predictability, which help young children feel safe and supported.

**When routines are consistent and engaging, they:**

- Foster a sense of belonging
- Build independence and confidence
- Support social and emotional skills
- Reduce challenging behaviors
- Volunteers play an important role in helping create calm, joyful group experiences.



# What this looks like in the Playspace



During a shift, you may see routines such as:

- Arrival, check in and welcome
- Free play
- Transitioning to a structured activity
- Group activity (craft, story time, music, etc.)
- Clean-up and goodbye



Volunteers can help children engage positively in these routines by using simple strategies and warm interactions.

# Your Role as a Volunteer



You are not expected to lead the entire group or manage behavior perfectly.

Your role is to:

- Support consistent routines and transitions
- Offer choices and encourage participation
- Model patience, flexibility, and positive behavior
- Create a calm, welcoming atmosphere for all children



# Try These Strategies



Group routines are opportunities for children to feel safe, included, and connected.

What you can do	Why it helps
Keep it simple	Clear, age-appropriate language and gestures support understanding.
Encourage participation	Inviting children to join songs or activities fosters engagement and a sense of belonging.
Provide transition warnings	Advance notice of changes helps children prepare and reduces resistance.
Model positive behavior	Demonstrating turn-taking, cooperation, and listening encourages children to do the same.
Be flexible and responsive	Adapting routines to individual needs supports inclusion and reduces frustration.
Foster a sense of belonging and teamwork	Warm language and affirming each child's contributions build community and connection.

*By offering consistent support, warm interactions, and flexibility, you help create a group experience<sup>8</sup> where children can thrive and have fun.*



# Scenario: Supporting Arrival and Welcome



**Child Age:** 3–5 years old

## **What Happens:**

A child arrives at the Playspace looking unsure. They hang back near the door, watching the other children play but not joining in.

## **What Not to Do:**

The PAL waits for the child to come in on their own without any acknowledgment. The child remains at the door and misses the start of the play session.

## **Why This Doesn't Help:**

Misses an opportunity to help the child feel included  
Increases feelings of shyness or separation anxiety  
Delays engagement in play and group activities

## **A Better Way:**

The PAL greets the child warmly at eye level:  
“Hi, I’m so glad you’re here! We’re building a train track over there. Do you want to come see and help me find the next piece?”

## **Why This Works:**

- Helps the child feel seen and welcomed
- Encourages early participation in the routine
- Builds trust and a sense of belonging

## **Skills Supported:**

- Positive social entry
- Confidence in new environments
- Connection with peers and adults

# Scenario: Encouraging Positive Participation and Clean-Up



**Child Age:** 3–6 years old

## **What Happens:**

It's the end of the session, and the group begins cleaning up. One child hides behind a shelf, avoiding the clean-up routine.

## **What Not to Do:**

The PAL calls out from across the room, "Stop hiding and help clean up!" The child frowns and stays put.

## **Why This Doesn't Help:**

Creates shame and resistance

Doesn't connect the child to the group routine

Misses a chance to make clean-up engaging

## **A Better Way:**

The PAL walks over, crouches down, and says with a smile:

"We're putting the blocks away now so they're ready for next time. Can you be my block-carrying helper? Let's see if we can get them all in the bin before the song ends!"

## **Why This Works:**

- Makes clean-up fun and interactive
- Connects the child to the group activity
- Builds a sense of contribution and accomplishment

## **Skills Supported:**

- Responsibility and teamwork
- Transition readiness
- Following group expectation

# Tip Sheet



## TIP SHEET Creating Routines for Smoother Shifts



### Why Group Routines Matter

Group routines provide structure and predictability, which help young children feel safe and supported.

#### When routines are consistent and engaging, they:

- Foster a sense of belonging
- Build independence and confidence
- Support social and emotional skills
- Reduce challenging behaviors

Volunteers play an important role in helping create calm, joyful group experiences.

### What This Looks Like in the Playspace

During a shift, you may see routines such as:

- Arrival and welcome
- Free play
- Transitioning to a structured activity
- Group activity (craft, storytime, music, etc.)
- Clean-up and goodbye

Volunteers can help children engage positively in these routines by using simple strategies and warm interactions.

### Your Role as a PAL

You are not expected to lead the entire group or manage behavior perfectly. Your role is to:

- Support consistent routines and transitions
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## TIP SHEET Creating Routines for Smoother Shifts



### Sample Playspace Shift Routine:

#### 5:45 PM – PAL Arrival

- One PAL arrives early, gets the roster from staff, and creates nametags for children.
- Set up a simple table activity (craft, coloring) before children arrive.

#### 6:00 PM – Welcome the Children

- Greet parents, check children off on roster, distribute nametags & buzzers
- Greet children warmly (high five or fist-bump)
- Remind parents about pick-up time.

#### 6:15 PM – Free Play

- Put out simple materials (crayons, markers).
- Support free play with various toys and materials.
- Spread out across the room to supervise.
- Follow the child's lead and suggest activities as needed.
- Comment positively on children's play and interactions.

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## TIP SHEET Creating Routines for Smoother Shifts



### Sample Playspace Shift Routine:

#### 7:00 PM – Transition to Structured Activity

- Save messier activities (paint, playdough) for this time.
- Use bubbles, chime, or music to signal transition.
- Cue children: "First we clean up, then we'll paint!"

#### 7:15 PM – Structured Activity

- Set up an activity (playdough, paint). Offer simple choices.
- Participation is always optional.
- One PAL finishes clean-up while others support the activity.
- Encourage cooperation and sharing.

#### 7:45 PM – Goodbye Transition

- Use songs and bubbles to transition to clean-up.
- Give time warnings (15 minutes, then 10 minutes remaining).
- Model and praise clean-up.
- Say goodbye with positive comments and high fives.
- Invite children to share something they enjoyed.

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## TRY IT YOURSELF! Creating Routines for Smoother Shifts



Group routines are opportunities for children to feel safe, included, and connected.

*By offering consistent support, warm interactions, and flexibility, you help create a group experience where children can thrive and have fun.*

WHAT YOU CAN DO	WHY IT HELPS
Keep it simple	Clear, age-appropriate language and gestures support understanding.
Encourage participation	Inviting children to join songs or activities fosters engagement and a sense of belonging.
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# PAL Resource Page



PROGRAMS > PAL RESOURCES

## PAL RESOURCES

The Playspace program is made possible by the 700 dedicated PALs across Massachusetts who bring kindness, play experiences, and moments of joy to children living in shelter every week! Horizons staff is committed to the success of the volunteers, the program, and the families we serve. Ensuring volunteers feel prepared and confident is important to us and your feedback is welcome. Email us at [palsupport@horizonschildren.org](mailto:palsupport@horizonschildren.org) if you have suggestions or feedback.

### Tip Sheets

The following resources and tip sheets are designed to empower you with the tools and knowledge needed to support the children served in Playspace. For more in depth information, attend one of our ongoing training sessions!

#### Playspace Policies

#### Activity Ideas

#### Building Healthy Relationships

#### Language Support

#### Managing Behaviors

#### Outdoor Playspace

- [Policies and Procedures](#)
- [Attire Guidelines](#)
- [Incident Reporting Guide](#)
- [Incident Report Form](#)
- [Non-Permitted Items & Materials](#)
- [Communication Guide](#)

# Final Thoughts



Routines help children feel safe, confident, and ready to join in.

Your warm, steady presence supports smoother transitions, reduces stress, and builds skills children carry beyond the Playspace.

