



Taking the Stress Out of Back to School: A Parent's Guide

Ready or not, it's "back to school" time. Soon you and your family may have a tighter schedule filled with more activities and responsibilities. It's not just children who may need help easing back into the school year - - parents can use the help too. Being organized and prepared can help lessen everyone's stress.

Here are some common areas where families experience stress during the school year and some tips on how to manage them:

Morning Mayhem

"Where is my backpack? I can't find my favorite jeans. I don't know where my homework is..." Does this sound familiar? Getting everyone off to school and work on time can be challenging. Try the following:

- Get plenty of sleep
 - The earlier kids get to bed, the easier it will be for them to wake up on time
- Start early
 - Get up 1/2 hour before everyone else
 - Make lunches the night before
 - Take showers at night
- Develop a launching pad – have a place near the door for each family member where the following items can be placed the night before, ready to grab as you leave the house:
 - For kids:
 - Lunches
 - Backpacks (already packed with signed permission slips etc.)
 - Projects
 - Library books
 - For adults:
 - Car keys
 - Work items
 - Lunches
 - Movies to return
- Have a morning routine:
 - Keeping a schedule helps children understand what is expected of them and reduce the amount of time spent nagging them to get ready.
 - Follow through with the schedule. For older children, explain expectations once and follow through. For example, "Please get dressed, eat breakfast, comb your hair and brush your teeth by 7:30. If you're not done by then, we're leaving anyway." Then, follow through. Going to school with messy hair and an empty stomach may be consequence enough to keep on task the next morning.

Homework Hassles

Children are likely to perform better in school if they have an established homework routine:

- Set up special area for doing homework
- Discuss timing – does your child accomplish more immediately after school or do they need time to unwind first?
- Limit distractions (no television, telephone, Instant Messaging etc.)
- Go over assignments and make sure they understand how to complete them

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- Set consequences together – talk about what should happen if homework isn't done, draft and sign an agreement and keep it on hand to avoid disagreements later.

Bedtime Blues

Your kids may have had a different bedtime schedule during the summer and are used to staying up and sleeping later. But keeping this schedule can leave them sleep deprived and affect their school performance. It can take days or weeks to adjust back to a “school time” schedule so a few weeks before school starts is the time to begin making the adjustment.

- Determine new goal bedtime
- Put children to bed 15 minutes earlier each consecutive night
- Avoid televisions or computers in bedroom
- A small snack of a protein and carbohydrate (cheese and cracker, for example) can help kids fall asleep more easily because they are not hungry when they go to bed

Abundant Activities

Your child may be involved in sports, clubs, or social activities. With so much going on, it's easy to become overwhelmed. Here are some general ways to make life easier and get organized:

- Join a carpool
- Create a workspace for processing all your paperwork
- Set-up files (files for each day of the month and month of the year) as reminders for things that need to be done by certain months or dates and check the files daily
- Keep one schedule on the fridge for the whole family and write everything on it/schedule in regular appointments (sports, music lessons)
- Record each person's appointments in a different color marker
- Make each child responsible for reporting his / her activities

You still may have stressful days but hopefully these ideas (and a few deep breaths) will help you manage the school year successfully.

References:

1. Corporation for Educational Technology. (n.d.). *Avoiding Homework MELTDOWN!*. Retrieved August 8, 2008 from: <http://www.buddyproject.org/jfy/parents/articles/homework.asp>
2. Organized Home.com. (2007). *Tame Morning Madness with a Family Launch Pad*. Retrieved August 8, 2008 from: <http://www.organizedhome.com/tame-morning-madness-launch-pad>

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