

Ten Tips for a Smooth Back-to-School Transition

Remember the first day of school? Stiff new jeans and a backpack full of fresh school supplies? The first fallen leaves of the season crunching underfoot?

Nostalgia is great, but as a parent you need to be prepared for real world pitfalls. The following tips can help minimize back-to-school stress that comes with transition and get the year off to a great start:

10. Provide closure for summer

Whether it means a family trip, summer camp or just more time to play and be a kid, summer is a special time for most children. Help your child create a keepsake – a journal, photo album or framed photo, for example – to end summer on a positive note.

9. Get involved

Students whose parents play an active role in their education tend to perform better academically.¹ Discuss expectations before the school year begins, and maintain an open dialog about schoolwork and extracurricular activities throughout the year. Emphasize enjoyment of learning and the excitement of discovery, however, not grades and test scores.

8. Adjust your child's attitude

Some students are eager to begin the new year, others positively dread it. Most kids fall somewhere in between. Keep in mind that the way you talk about learning and school has a profound effect on your child's attitude. Find out what your child likes and dislikes about school, and be sure to discuss any anxieties he has. Help your child focus on the positive by showing interest in the aspects of school he enjoys most.

7. Organize the family

Begin the school year by posting a calendar in a central location, and write each family member's appointments, extracurricular activities, major due dates and test dates on it. Make a habit of checking the schedule for the upcoming week every Sunday.

6. Foster organizational skills

Help your child develop a system for keeping track of homework, handouts and notes for each subject, and teach her to use checklists. For younger children, you may be the one making the list (keep it short), but allow your child to check off completed items. As your child gets older you can be less involved, but stay in the loop to help keep her on track.

5. Make mornings pleasant

Plan your morning routine before the first day of school!

- What time does school start? Work backwards to determine what time family members need to wake up. Take your child's natural sleep patterns and morning personality into account. Some kids leap up at the right time on their own; others need a gentle prodding and five or ten minutes to wake up before getting out of bed.
- Get a head start on the morning the night before. Check that homework is complete, put into the appropriate folder, and stowed in your child's backpack. Pack lunches in the evening, and make sure backpacks, shoes (in pairs!) and jackets are where they belong.



4. Make after school rules

Before the school year begins, involve your child in developing ground rules for after school. Decide when and where your child will do homework (try to set up a comfortable spot with minimal distractions), specify limits on television and video game time, and encourage some active play every day.

3. Replenish your home library

Whether you prefer to buy or borrow, having books in your home is one of the surest ways to develop bright, curious minds. Visit these websites for recommended books and information on the benefits of reading:

- Reading is Fundamental – www.rif.org
- Association for Library Service to Children – www.ala.org/alsc
- Kid’s Reading List – www.oprah.com/packages/kid-reading-list.html

2. Eat breakfast

Who can concentrate with a growling stomach?

Research has shown that breakfast is the most important meal of the day for academic achievement, children’s health, cognitive development and mental health.²

Whole grain toast or cereal, low-fat milk, yogurt and fruit are all good, easy choices for breakfast. (When shopping for cereal, check the nutritional information before you buy.) If getting your child to eat first thing in the morning is a battle, pack a banana or an extra half sandwich to eat on the way to school or at recess.

1. Get enough sleep

Getting enough sleep is beneficial for learning, mood and overall health³ so prioritizing sleep is a challenge worth tackling.

Has your child’s bedtime slipped over the summer? Start moving toward earlier sleep and wake-up times now to avoid the pain of a sudden change.

WebMD recommends that students in grade school through high school get 9-10 hours of sleep per night.³ Make “bedtime” 30-60 minutes before the time your child should be asleep to allow for a relaxing bedtime routine.

Overcrowded schedules are problematic for kids of all ages. You may have to make some difficult choices in order to prioritize sleep, like not always finishing homework or not signing Johnny up for an activity that goes on into the evening.

1 Barth, Patte. 2011. Most Effective Parental Involvement. *American School Board Journal*. <http://www.asbj.com/MainMenuCategory/Archive/2011/November/Most-Effective-Parental-Involvement.html> (accessed June 11, 2012).

2 NEA Health Information Network. Start School with Breakfast. <http://www.neahin.org/educator-resources/start-school-with-breakfast.html> (accessed June 20, 2012).

3 WebMD. 2008. How Much Sleep Do Kids Need? <http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/video/breus-child-how-much-sleep#> (accessed June 20, 2012).

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