

Back to a Back to School Routine

Getting your kids to switch from the crazy, free days of summer into a Back to School routine again can be a little challenging. But with just a little advanced planning, you can get everyone back into a School frame of mind.

Get in the Groove Again.

A week or two before school starts again, start to get the kids back into a routine. No more sleeping in front of the TV. No more waking up at noon or with younger kids, no more waking up at 6 am. for no reason. Establish a bed time, start reading a story again before bed, and wake the kids up earlier in the morning to get their body into the 'school sleeping cycle' again. If they seem drowsy to you at first, don't worry! Remember that they bounce back quickly.

State the Rules.

Sit down at the dinner table one night and lay down your expectations for the school year. Remind them of the family rules like no breakfast until they are fully dressed. Get their backpack ready the night before. No TV or Wii until homework is done. No friends over until homework is done. Make a chart that visually reminds the kids what they need to do each morning or before bed - brush teeth, get backpack ready, set out clothes for the next day, make bed. This takes away your need to nag, or at least less of it.

Address hidden emotional concerns.

Kids are usually worried about going back to school, even if they don't express it. So ask them. Sit down one night at dinner and go around the table to ask your kids what they are most excited about and most worried about for the upcoming year. You'll be surprised at what concerns them and you may be able to help them eliminate the concern before school even starts. But only if you know what's bothering them. Most of your child's concern will most likely come from not knowing what to expect (so ask an older neighbor kid), where their class room is (go see it when you Meet the Teacher), or how to get on and off the bus (ask an older neighbor to be their bus buddy). Give them the confidence to start school right.

Be sure to take advantage of meet-the-teacher nights if your child's school offers it. It's nice to see the teacher and see which kids are in the class this year. If your school doesn't have one, schedule an appointment to go check out the school before hand. Exploring their new school together is always an adventure!

Get a Family Calendar. The Master Schedule should be easily accessible for all in the family. Teach your kids how to look at the family calendar and increase their sense of responsibility by letting them know what they need to prepare for the next day. Once school starts, have them sit with you and write in which days they have gym, art or music. Have fun marking the days off. Look at the calendar together after dinner so that everyone can prepare. Check their backpack to find those papers with new important dates to mark on the calendar. Even Dad will appreciate the family calendar when he comes home and can't find anyone. Check the calendar and see we're all at soccer practice.

Give your self time. Your kids can sense your moods. They are like bats that way. Their stress radars work great so do what you need to, to stay stress-free. Keeping yourself upbeat and calm in the morning can work wonders on how your kid's day goes. Whether it may be getting up extra early if you need to begin the day with a quiet morning, or just a cup of extra strong coffee is all you need; be sure to give your child your brightest smile in the morning- that is the best gift you can give your child to help them through the rest of the day. Then, when they get on the bus or your drop them off, have another cup of coffee. While it's not fair that you are the one that needs to sacrifice those extra precious minutes of sleep, it's better for all to not be freaked out in the morning.

Breakfast, it does a body good. Breakfast doesn't need to be elaborate but it does set the energy level for the whole day. Keep it simple with cereal, yogurt, granola, fruit, frozen waffles (no-trans fat, please) and hard boiled eggs, if they'll eat it. On Sunday you can make pancakes or French toast and freeze it for the week. Don't let your kids skip it though. Eat a cereal bar at the very least to get the brain going.