

Ask an Expert – Back to School Tips for Parents

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The first few weeks of school set the tone for the rest of the year, and there are things parents can do, starting from day one, to help their kids succeed. Consider these tips.

Establish Routines – Research shows that both kids' and adults' brains and bodies do best when there is predictability, stability and routines. Try to make each day predictable by having children go to bed and get up around the same time each day. Bedtime rituals might include brushing teeth, reading a book or sitting on their bed talking about their day.

Start the Night Before – Parents can prevent a great deal of morning stress by helping their children start the night before. Teach children to make and pack their own lunches. They can also lay out their clothes before going to bed, pack their school/gym bag and clean up their room, which can all help prevent chaos in the morning.

Place Responsibility on Your Child – The amount of responsibility you give your child will depend on his or her age and ability. But children can learn early on to set their own alarm clock and get up without having parents wake them. They can also be responsible for getting papers signed, turning in homework on time and asking for help before it is bedtime. Older children may find apps such as iHomework or MyHomeWork helpful as they organize assignments.

Refresh Your Screen Rules – Children usually have more time during the summer to play video games, text their friends and stay up watching movies. Revisit your family rules and limits about screen time and what's allowed, what electronics get turned in at night and when.

Make Time to Talk – When children come in the door or you come home from work, put aside distractions and make time to connect for even a few minutes before you rush to get dinner ready. Ask children open-ended questions such as the best part of their day, who their friends are and things they are learning or struggling to learn. Give them your entire attention for a few minutes and get excited about the good things they share.

Create a Family Calendar – Whether it's a digital calendar you all share or a calendar in the kitchen, encourage your children to include things on the calendar as soon as they know about them. Coordinating schedules can prevent unneeded stress. Let children use a system they are interested in and excited to use.

Know When to Say No - It's nice to help with PTA, fundraisers and classroom parties, but be cautious about signing up unless you know you have the bandwidth to do it. Being involved in your child's learning has been shown to boost parent-child relationships and academic outcomes, but don't be pressured into doing things that aren't realistic and will compromise your own well-being.

Don't Let Your Child Skimp on Sleep – Children between ages 3 and 12 need 10 to 12 hours of sleep every night to function their best the next day. For teenagers, social pressures may conspire against them to stay up later, but most teens need 8 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Encourage healthy sleeping routines right from the start of the year.

Make Time for Family Time – A new school year can feel overwhelming, so be sure to spend time together each day to reconnect. It could happen while making or eating a meal together, playing a game or sharing something before bedtime that made each of you happy.

Touch Base with Teachers – Check in early in the year with your child's teacher(s). Getting to know them and allowing them to get to know you can help when there are areas to troubleshoot.

Take Care of You – As the children head back to school, be sure to make time to reenergize yourself by doing things with other adults. This could include lunch dates, book clubs or heading back to the gym. Eating healthy, exercising and getting enough sleep go a long way in helping you be the best you can be. Remember that you are a much better parent when your tank is full.

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