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Back to school again.....

Tips on bringing your family back to school successfully

Once school approaches, the first thing you must do is plan a new routine. The summer, when everything was very relaxed and children stayed up late, watched more TV and did lots of fun activities, is over. In order to get children back into school successfully you must put a plan in place for the whole family. It can be a difficult time, both financially and emotionally, but with some planning and positive thinking it will go a lot smoother than you think.

Children don't really want to hear about school just yet as they want to enjoy the last few weeks of the summer, but there is a need in the coming weeks to sit down as a family and plan for the return to school.

Having a family meeting with your children can be a really useful way of getting everybody ready for school. Talk about what the summer has been like, plan any last treats or outings that you can, and then talk about what needs to be put in place for going back to school and for when school reopens.

Planning ahead

Think ahead and plan for the things which can cause problems, by doing so, you can avoid them.

- What time is good for homework?
- What afterschool activities will be happening?
- Who is responsible for lunch boxes?
- How can everyone get up and ready for school in the mornings?

By talking through these issues it will help you to make a list of what needs to be done and who can do it. School aged children need to be involved in this plan and to be given practical things to do.

Checklists

Children can make check lists of what they need to do now to get ready and parents can help them plan how they can follow through. Checklists can also be prepared for the day when school reopens with what each family member will be responsible for. Stick it on the fridge door, with gold stars ready for those who follow through.

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Bedtime routine

Bedtime routines need to be reintroduced if they have been let lapse over the summer months. Agree with your children a time that is suitable for them to be in bed at and then plan what the bedtime routine will involve, things like getting washed, leaving uniforms ready for the morning, having homework done and in school bags, preparing snacks and having story time. You could introduce a checklist for the whole family which covers what has to be done and get everyone in the family to take responsibility for their jobs. Bedtime should be fun but it should also be predictable for all the family so there are no arguments. For example, once you say 8pm bedtime then you, as the parent, need to stick to this as you will see that children do a lot better in school if they're not tired and cranky from too little sleep and arguments in the morning.

Evening routine and homework

Once the bedtime routine is in place you need to develop an evening routine which starts when the children get in from school – you as a family need to decide when the homework gets done. Remember, no matter what age your children are they need you to sit with them doing their homework. Until at least eight years old you may need to sit with them from start to finish. As they get older, you need to check all homework after they have finished. If you take a keen interest in your child's schoolwork it will really show in their performance – remember school journals normally need to be signed every night. Children often need help with spelling and maths so it is important to prioritise homework and some other household chores may have to wait.

Breakfast

Don't fight over breakfast, sometimes children just don't want it. Talk with your child about the importance of eating. Talk with them about what they would like for breakfast and try to have a favourite breakfast at least once a week or on Monday and Friday when we are all a bit more tired.

Lunch boxes

Google the healthy food sites and get some ideas for lunch boxes. Get children to take responsibility for their lunch boxes from a young age, if they know what they can bring then they can choose what they want to put in their box. Remember, if they get hungry in school it is not the end of the world - they will soon learn they need to bring more food. There is no point in giving your child lunch they will not eat, try to ensure they have a good breakfast and then nutritious snacks such as fresh fruit, dried apricots, raisins, popcorn, yogurts, sandwiches, cheese, crackers, fruit pots and fruit juice for their lunch box. Some children will not eat much lunch as they may be too busy playing so they will need a nutritious snack as soon as they get in from school if the evening meal doesn't happen until later when all the family are home. Remember, a lot of

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schools have a green policy which means no sugary foods in the lunch boxes. Get your children to be involved in the shopping and allow them to choose healthy snacks for school lunches and dinners.

Uniforms

It is good to get children to take off uniforms when they get in from school and put on play clothes. This helps keep the washing down as uniforms will not get destroyed with messy dinners or outdoor play. Also try to ensure your child has some free play time when they get home – maybe a run around the park while the weather is still good as this releases energy and helps them settle down for homework.

Getting children involved

Some children hate the idea of going back to school so it is important to try and make it special for them. Involve them in buying the new school bag or lunch box or the new markers or fancy note pad, as all these things make school more enjoyable. Try to get to know the parents of their friends and encourage play dates at the weekends or one day after school, usually Friday, as you want to keep to the normal routines during the week and if friends come over it may be hard to keep to the bedtime and homework routine.

Talking to your child

Talk to your child about school, ask them about their friends and teacher, and what fun things they did in school. Often by making time to sit with your child and talk, you will hear things about school that you would not have heard otherwise.

Problems at school

If you suspect they are having problems don't be afraid to go in and meet the teacher and discuss it. Teachers are usually very happy to meet parents and get to know them as this helps them get to know your child. If your child or family is experiencing any difficulties which may be affecting your child's behaviour in school talk to the teacher so they know why a change has occurred. This way the teacher can be more sensitive to your child's needs.

After school activities

Plan after school activities and see if sharing lifts with other parents is possible. Plan the menu of weekday dinners – plan simple but healthy meals for the days you are out at after school activities so there is enough time in the evening to get everything done and for parents to get children to bed and to have a break themselves.

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Parent time

Remember, as a parent you have probably enjoyed a relaxed routine for the summer but once school approaches you must also get into a new routine that fits with the children's needs. Try to find time to relax every day even if it is only for ten minutes to put your feet up or watch your favourite programme. The more time you put into planning the week the smoother it should go for the whole family.

You need to identify your needs at this time and take responsibility for them being met – your children will not and should not meet your needs – so if you are dreading the whole month of September make time for yourself in this month. Remember parents must parent themselves and care for their own needs before they can parent children and meet their many needs.

When children are back at school it can be a really busy time so try to ensure you have some quality time with your child a few times a week, ideally each day, but in busy families this may not be realistic. Often we say we are with our children all the time but we could be busy doing other things while we are 'with' them meaning that we may not be truly present. Try to fit in 20 minutes as often as you can with each child individually to have quality interactions. This will support your child to cooperate with you and have a more positive parent child relationship.

Chores

Lastly get children to help out in the home – make a family checklist of what chores need to be done and each person, no matter how small, can have a responsibility. If children have chores and are helped to follow through it will build their self esteem which can impact very positively on school work. Children will often say 'I can't do that' or 'this is too hard' – but when you help them achieve something, it will boost confidence and affect all other areas of their lives.

Have fun

Have fun on the weekends – try to have one family event each weekend – time to relax or run about in the park – there are many things to do which don't cost money. It's about being together as a family and saying 'that was a good week, let's do it again next week.' Or maybe it wasn't so good, so as a family you need to sit down and look back and see what each person can do next week to help improve things.

You can do it as a family – don't go it alone!

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