

Better Parenting: 14 Tips For Getting Back To School

By Sonia Spackman

As parents, we have much to deal with; our kids' emotions, clothes shopping, school supplies, sports equipment, and starting new routines. I don't know about you, but this time of the year I usually want a little more summer and just a little more time. Three of my kids were "at the ready" and excited to start school. The other two seemed to experience the "back to school blues" with worried and anxious feelings. Summer is almost gone again, so here are a few tips to get geared up for the new school year.

1. UNDERSTANDING STRESSES AT DIFFERENT AGES

Kids can get off to a bumpy start with a switch to a new grade, a new teacher and new kids. Some kids worry about fitting in and making friends. Stress can intensify when kids make a big leap from grade school to middle school or to high school. Even normally-confident kids can be thrown off-guard, as the pressure to succeed and fit in feels very competitive or stressful.

2. ASK QUESTIONS, IT'S OK, REALLY

Starting school stress is normal. Through these changes big and small, your child will look to you, not always for advice, but to hear your thoughts and ideas about things that are troubling them. When they say, "Never mind, I don't want to talk about it," kids sometimes really do want to talk about it. Parents sometimes worry about not giving their kids enough privacy or their rights. It is OK to ask questions; what kids don't want are lectures.

3. SHARE YOUR OWN FIRST-DAY SCHOOL JITTERS

You know how you feel when you are told, "Don't be so worried, it's going to be ok." It doesn't help, does it? Let your kids share their feelings and concerns while you listen, rather than dismissing your child's concerns. Let them know it's normal to be nervous. Share some positive and funny stories about your back-to-school nervousness. I discovered I needed to let my kids "just talk" without trying to change their thinking. Try to remember kids often feel our worry and eagerness about school starting. When we are upbeat and positive, they can get that from us, too.

4. IF A CHILD DOES NOT WANT TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL

If you have a child who does not want to go back to school, ask your child why and help your child feel at ease. Maybe it would help your child to know what to expect in their new grade level. Maybe you could call the grade school and see if the teacher is available to meet your child. Explain your situation and make arrangements for a brief visit to meet the teacher and see the classroom. If your child walks to school, walking your child to school the day before school starts might help him or her become more familiar with the school routine. Maybe you can buy a special toy or book as a way of "looking forward" to the first day of school. You might want to prepare your least-excited child by saying, "You can have your game, toy or book when you get home from school." If it is possible to get your child with other kids who will be in the same classroom, this may help ease the anxiety of the first day. With older children, you can go over their class schedule with them so they know where each classroom is located, especially if this is their first year in a Vernonia school. Point out possible options your child might like to get involved in that is enjoyable to them. You could point out, "Next year, you will be the experienced kid that can help the new kids around." If nervousness persists more than a couple of weeks after school starts, the school counselors often help. You may call Mr. Spackman at the grade school for grades kindergarten - 6th or Mr. Weisel at the high school for grades 7-12. If your child is having attention, depression and friendship problems talk to your doctor, the school counselor or teachers to get ideas.

5. TRY LISTENING ACTIVELY

A "one-on-one" conversation with a child who is having a particularly hard time can go a long way. Allow your child to share their feelings while you listen carefully. Let them know by your relaxed body posture and eye contact you want to hear what they have to say. When they are finished, you can ask, "May I tell you what I think you are saying?" Then briefly describe what your child told you. If your child says, "No, I said ...," this is your opportunity to say something like, "Oh, I'm glad you pointed that out so I can really get it." Then start again, "Ok, what you are saying is" Do this until you understand what your child is telling you. Believe me, if you are wrong, they will let you know. Listen completely, without judging or problem-solving,

unless they are asking for help in solving a problem.

6. SET LIMITS ON BEHAVIOR

The previous practice will go a long way to relaxing your child and continuing open communication with a child of any age. However, if your child becomes disrespectful, you might say, "Mom's or dad's (whoever) ARE NOT to be disrespected. I will talk to you when I do not hear disrespect and your voice sounds as soft as mine. (Hopefully your voice is soft.) Add, "We will be taking a time out, then we can try again later." Remember, kids will not handle a situation better than the adult does.

7. SHOP MORE THAN ONCE FOR SCHOOL CLOTHES AND SUPPLIES

Back-to-school shopping is probably the most stressful and most expensive part of getting ready for the school year. Tell them you will not buy everything all at once. Break down the expense little by little, and wait for the sales each week to get the best deals. Before you go shopping, prepare a budget with each of your children, be honest with your kids and let them know what to expect. They will learn a lesson and be less likely to get upset if you can't afford something they want. Agree to let your children pick out something that they like, even if you don't. If your child doesn't like the clothes you picked, he or she may feel uncomfortable at school or refuse to wear them.

8. TEACH YOUR KIDS TO ORGANIZE FIRST

After the budgets are determined and before the first shopping trip, tell the kids that you are setting aside part of a day to help them organize their rooms. Get rid of the clutter and have them organize their drawers and closets. With a clean room, you'll get your kid started with a new school year on the right foot. When they get home from shopping, have them put their things away neatly. Make a habit with the kids to lay out their clothes the night before so it's easier to get ready for school in the morning. You might want to have a routine for when homework is done. Have them immediately put it in the backpack with any books that were used and placed in the same exact spot every day, such as by the door. This will save you and the kids morning panic trying to gather up homework and find the backpack. Also, be sure to check the backpack each day for any information sent home from the school.

9. SHOPPING FOR SCHOOL SUPPLIES

Again, go shopping with the kids for school supplies, and let them make some of the choices. It will get them in the school spirit. When you bring the supplies home from the store, let the kids organize them and put them in their backpacks. Keep in mind that the school's supply list is different for each grade. Train your children to keep supplies in their backpacks except when using them.

10. FUEL THE MIND AND BODY

No matter how fancy the sneakers, the most important way to ensure your child's success is to make nutritious meals and snacks for your kids and cut back the sweets and caffeine. You don't want your children hyper or experiencing sugar crashes when school starts. Eating too much sugar impairs their brain. It acts like a drug, making them tired, irritable and foggy or hyper. It is linked to headaches, mood-swings and weight-gain. Brain-healthy foods for breakfast might be oatmeal with raisins, string cheese with wheat crackers and fruit or scrambled eggs with cheese in a tortilla. Afternoon snacks could be string cheese, prepackaged fruit cups or oatmeal raisin cookies. Evening snacks could include plain yogurt drizzled with honey and sunflower seeds, air-popped or low-fat popcorn with a sprinkle of Parmesan cheese. Keep in mind that the schools serve an excellent, balanced, nutritious breakfast and lunch.

11. SET A TIME /PLACE FOR HOMEWORK AND CHORES

Before school starts, set aside time each day your children

will use for homework and chores. Homework needs to be at a time and place that has a quiet, peaceful environment. It is a good idea to have an hour of fun and a snack after school, and then it's time to do the homework. Homework needs to start before 5:00 PM. This routine helps kids develop the habits for tougher and longer assignments that are required in middle school, high school and college. Help your child learn to be a self-starter when it comes to homework and planning for projects and tests. Post a calendar on a wall, door or desk just for tests and projects. Another large calendar can be used for the family schedule. Have each child choose a color, and each child's color makes the days of their activities stand out to you and them.

12. TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT ACTIVITIES

Watch for over-scheduling your children. So many parents make the mistake of planning every minute. Kids need playtime, downtime and REST! Racing home after sports or clubs, day in and day out, is exhausting and does not produce good study habits or sane parents

13. PLAN FOR ENOUGH SLEEP AND BEGIN QUICKLY

If your kids have been staying up later during the summer like most kids, start getting them to bed a little earlier each night and waking up a little earlier each day. The last thing you want is the hassle of trying to get them out of bed in time for school starting with the first day-- not to mention them dragging around all day at school cranky and tired. Kids need to be rested to do well in school. Start getting the kids into the routine by turning off the TV and video games 15 minutes earlier each night and having your child read a book, or read to you before bedtime to alleviate their anxiety and get them to relax. Get them to bed another 15 minutes early the next nights and up an additional 15 minutes each morning until they are at the routine they need to get their rest.

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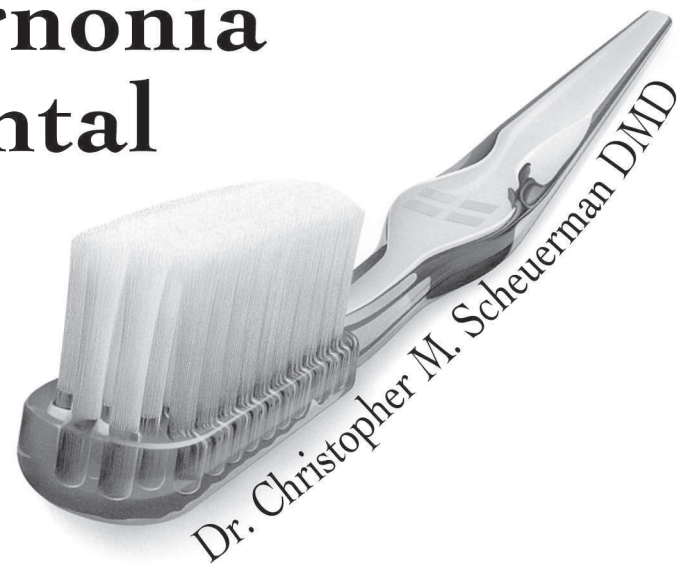
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