



Getting Ready for the Start of School

With summer vacation quickly coming to an end, I am often asked by parents how best to prepare young children for the upcoming start of school. Shifting from late evenings playing with neighbors and friends outside to bedtimes, early morning wake ups and more regimented routines can create some stress in children both young and old. Here are some tips to help ease the transition from summer vacation to school schedules.

Reacquaint the child with the environment: School, whether it's preschool, elementary or beyond is a child's home away from home. Next to their house, it is likely where they will spend the most time for the next 9 months. If the school is new, make some trips to the campus or playground to familiarize your child with their surroundings. Play on the play structures; spend time on the fields or surrounding spaces. When you find out which classroom will be your child's, locate it and let them orient themselves to where it is in the building(s). Practice walking from the parking lot to the important location so it doesn't feel unfamiliar come the start of school.

Start to work towards a reasonable bedtime routine: Don't wait until the night before school starts to insist that your kids "get to bed on time." Rather start several days before and move the bedtime back in small increments. Children can't make big jumps in sleep schedules. If you've gotten in the habit of a late summer bedtime for the kids, start by re-establishing routines (bath time, stories, etc.) before school starts and move the bedtime 10-15 minutes earlier every night until you've gotten to your target time. Likewise if you've been used to sleeping in a bit in the morning, begin getting them up earlier each day and have them establish morning routines. It doesn't have to be a drag to get up before 10am. You can have fun morning activities planned (like going out to breakfast) to celebrate the last precious few days of summer.

Talk about how everybody feels about going back to school: After the initial obvious negative responses about having to wake up early and do homework, tap into the positive aspects such as reconnecting with friends, getting to experience new activities, and moving up in the "food chain". This is also a great time to find out about any fears or apprehensions your child may

have about starting new schools or having new teachers. Try to make this transition time a learning experience. Have your child write down their feelings and expectations, both positive and negative (younger children can dictate to you to write down). Save these sentiments, review them, and add to them after a month, 3 months and at the end of the year. It helps children to document apprehension that they may have at the start of something new and then look back and reflect on that once they are familiar with the situation and that fear has dissipated.

Don't over-schedule the first few weeks: Give your children and yourself time to adjust to the new routine. The first week or two can be really tiring, so it is important to not have anybody overextend themselves. Plan to come home after you pick your kids up from school, relax and start in on homework. Save after school play dates and other social activities for after the routines have been reestablished. Don't plan any weekend sleep overs or trips for the first few weeks.

With a little bit of foresight and planning, the transition from summer back to school can be both exciting and stress free. Help your kids start off the year on the right foot by keeping a positive attitude and giving the entire family time to pace themselves as they start on a new adventure!!

--Be well

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