

## OFF TO A GREAT START

### Creating Morning Routines for the New School Year

#### “Rise and Shine “

Morning madness describes the rushed early morning scramble some families experience trying to get out the door on time for work and school. Most parents, at one time or another, have dropped their children off at school feeling tense, frustrated and exhausted: needless to say the children may walk into school with the same feelings. Waking children up, getting them out of bed, fed, dressed and to school while grabbing all the essential gear for the day is sometimes a major challenge. Many parents long to have pleasant, positive way to start the day with their family.

The beginning of a new school year is a perfect time to evaluate your family’s morning routine and fine tune the areas that could use some attention. When parents are asked what advice they would give to improve this transition time, they invariably have the same recommendations about creating a calmer beginning of the day. Reflecting on mornings that are disasters contrasted to mornings that go like clockwork, parents usually conclude that two habits are needed.

At the top of the advice list is waking up earlier (especially before young children awaken), and the second suggestion is to prepare as much as possible the night before. These common sense ideas seem simple and obvious, but require organization and self discipline which are sometimes hard to employ. Many parents recommend that children or adults (if they have young children) make lunches, sign papers, pick out clothes, pack back packs including homework, and lay out shoes, jackets, uniforms, equipment and other needed items. A specific designated place near the door for each child’s personal items is helpful, including shoes, and hooks for coats and book bags.

Gathering needed items and getting organized for the next school day is a skill children need to learn overtime while gradually taking over more of the tasks to prepare for the next day. It is more productive to start preparations early in the evening before everyone is too tired.

Another common recommendation is for parents to wake up earlier to have time to focus on you. Some children also need more transition time to wake slowly without popping out of bed feeling hurried. Another tip is to start your child’s morning off in a nurturing way. Younger children may need time to transition from sleep with a back rub, listening to some music, or talking quietly about the day ahead.

Try to detect the best order for the routine morning tasks with each family member in mind. For example, some children function better if breakfast is first while having breakfast later can encourage other children to finish their tasks in a timely way. In general, making the tasks fun and playful as well as having a short, enjoyable activity to do when the work is finished is beneficial. After all the morning tasks are completed, including brushing teeth, putting on shoes and placing a book bag by the door, some parents create time for motivating activities like reading a book or playing with the dog. Many parents recommend that the TV (or other electronic devices) stay off entirely, or, if allowed on, only after the tasks are complete and with a preplanned agreement about when it goes off.



Another strategy is to evaluate where the best place in the house is for a child to get dressed. Some need a non-stimulating environment like the hall; others stay focused if they are in their parents room chatting and receiving encouragement.

Last, as with evening routines, children appreciate being given transition warnings like, “Five minutes until you walk to the bus.” They respond more cooperatively when expectations are stated positively: “As soon as your teeth are brushed, you may play with the dog for a few minutes”.

Easy mornings actually begin the night before with a calming bedtime routine that allows just the right amount of sleep needed for your child. When parents and children both have sufficient sleep and have planned ahead, they can rise early enough to avoid rushing, share a healthy breakfast, and set the stage for a pleasant morning as well as a successful school/work day for everyone in the family.

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