

Back to School – How to Get a Good Routine Going

Tip on How to Get in to a School Routine



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Introduction

Before you know it the school bells will be ringing and it will be time for children to head back to school. If you're wondering about how to get a good routine going, consider the following ideas to help you create your own. Once you have a routine in place, the chance your family will be able to start the new school year on a bright and less harried note will be increased.

Don't wait too long to set up your back to school routine. The longer you wait to get the children into the habit of going to bed at a set bedtime, the harder time your children will have getting up for school in the morning. Of course, if you can help your children get into the routine of going to bed earlier, choosing their clothes for the next day and being sure everything is in their book bag the day will start much better.

Attending a new school

Think about how you felt when you started at a new school. You were probably a little bit scared or nervous. Chances are your child will be, too. What can you do to help them feel less scared?

One thing you can do before school starts is to visit their new school. Stop by the front office and explain that your child is going to be attending the school and ask if they can get a tour. If they can't take the time to go with you around the school, they will probably allow you to walk through on your own.

See if you can meet with your child's teacher while you're there. If they're not available, you can at least find out where your child's homeroom class will be. You may already have their schedule for the year; if this is true try to find all the other classrooms. In fact, you may want to walk with them through their schedule by going with them to each classroom as they would during school.

Don't forget to find the other important rooms of a school building. Locate the bathrooms, especially the ones along their daily path, so they'll know where they can go when they have a minute between classes. You'll also want to find the lunchroom and the library. If they're involved in sports find the locker rooms or the band room if they play an instrument.

Will your child ride the bus, walk to school or will you take them every day? Find the quickest way for them to get to school if they'll be walking to school. Take the time to drive them along that route so they know where they're going. If you're going to be driving your child to school, take them with you as you drive by the school. Help them get familiar with the route you'll take each day.

By taking the time to go with your child to their new school you are helping them be prepared. They won't get lost as quickly because they'll already have a general idea of the layout of the school. They'll also know where their classes are, what the best way to get to school is, and will feel more comfortable going through their first day of school.

Decide when you have to get up

It will be much easier to decide what time your children need to go to bed if you know what time they have to get up in the morning. Most experts agree children need between 9 and 10 hours of sleep each night to be at their best, 8 hours would be an absolute minimum. If you know your child must be up at 6 a.m. in order to be ready for school by 7:30 a.m., you would want your children to begin getting ready for bed around 7:30 p.m. This would mean dinner would have to be earlier as well, but if you want your children to get the correct amount of sleep to be ready for school, you may want to make some adjustments to your entire day.

When you know what time your children need to be up in the morning, and when they need to get to sleep, determining a schedule for the remainder of their day should be easier. Here are some things you'll want to consider when planning the day.

A good day starts with a good night's sleep

It's not unusual for parents to allow their children to stay up later during the summer than during the school year. If you've been lax at making your children go to bed at a regular time you may want to make some changes. Of course, you can expect your children to complain and try to stay up later, but you know the earlier they get to bed the better prepared they'll be for school.

You may want to explain to your children the importance of getting a good night's sleep. Tell them that it is during sleep the body heals itself. Getting enough sleep will help them have the energy they need to stay awake during school. It will also help them focus on the tasks before them. Besides these benefits of a good night's sleep, they will be less cranky which will enable them to be better company.

To ensure your children are ready to go back to school, you'll want them to get readjusted to going to bed early enough to be able to get up on time. How do you accomplish this? A couple of weeks before the first day of school, have your children begin going to bed earlier each night until they are used to their earlier bed time.

For instance, if your children have been used to staying up two hours later than they would during school, you'd want to have the children go to bed half an hour earlier every night for a few days. Then you'd have them go to bed another half hour earlier for a few days until they're finally going to bed at the best time for them to get the rest they need. The earlier you start this process, the simpler it will be for them to get used to going to bed earlier again.

Decide what time your children need to get to sleep. Depending upon their ages and how many children you have they may have different bed times. If this is the case, have the younger children choose their clothes for the next day before they take a bath, brush their teeth and put on their pajamas.

Get them in the habit, or routine, of following a specific pattern each night. If you have them choose their clothing for the next day, take a bath, brush their teeth, get into their pajamas every night before they go to bed, you're transitioning them into settling down. Having a set routine such as this, or any schedule you use as a family, will give them a strong sense of continuity and help them wind down. It may even reduce the number of complaints your children have about bedtime.

Older children may be allowed to stay up later than very young children. However, you probably won't want them to stay up too late. Have them follow the same type of pattern – choosing their clothes, taking care of their personal needs and going to bed – so they'll be ready to get a good night's sleep.

Another benefit of getting the children to bed earlier in the evening rather than waiting until they get tired is everyone will be more rested to face the day ahead of them. Since they've taken the time to choose their clothing the night before you won't be faced with questions like "Mom, have you seen my blue shirt?" or "Hey, Mom, where are my tennis shoes?" You may not believe how this one activity taken the night before can make your morning seem to flow smoother.

Once the children are in bed you may not want to turn the lights out right away. Take some time to enjoy one-on-one time with your children. Depending on their ages, you can read them a bedtime story before they settle down for the night or simply take that time to connect on a personal level.

Help them know what to expect by talking about the next day. What activities are planned? Do they have a doctor's appointment? Will you pick them up from school at an unusual time? What activities do you have to do after they get home from school? Do you have to run to the store or take care of other errands? Anything you can do to prepare them for the next day will make things easier on the whole family.

When you're finished with your special time with each child, you can tell them you love them, kiss them goodnight (if they will still allow you) and turn out the light. Older children may be allowed to sit up and read quietly for a little while before lights out. Now you can do what you can to prepare for the next day.

Things you can do to make tomorrow flow better

Sit down and look at your calendar. Are there things you have to get done in your day? Make a list, prioritize it and then post it where you can find it in the morning. Think about the different places you have to be – dry cleaners, grocery store, library, etc. – and plan your trip. Make a large circle,

if possible, rather than crisscrossing around town. If you have to get refrigerated groceries, you'd obviously want to complete that stop in your trip last to ensure the food doesn't spoil.

When the school year starts you can expect the school to send school work home for the parents to look over. After the children are in bed and you've had a chance to relax, get your child's backpack. Look through it to see if there are any papers you need to sign, any important dates to write on the calendar and then do what needs to be done. Place everything that requires your attention back into the backpack and place it near the door you'll exit. This will keep your children from asking where their backpack is, you'll have looked over their work, and you won't be surprised about a field trip or important date.

You may also want to set the table for breakfast the night before. Plan what will be served for breakfast and place those dishes on the table. This may not seem like a big deal but it can cut a few minutes out of the morning rush.

Will your children take their lunch to school or will they purchase it there? If your children are brown-bagging it, prepare as much of their lunch the night before. Depending upon what they're taking you may be able to prepare the entire meal and have it ready for them to grab from the refrigerator and go out the door.

Morning routines are important

One item you may want to purchase for your children at the beginning of the school year is an alarm clock. By giving your child an alarm clock you are giving them some responsibility for getting up on time. Does this mean you won't have to nudge them to get them out of bed when school first starts? Absolutely not; in fact, chances are you'll have to remind them over and over to get up, get dressed and eat so they can get to school on time.

It may be best to get the children up early the first week or so of school until they're able to rise and get ready by themselves. As they become more accustomed to their new schedule you can let them sleep a little later. Remember, you want them to have ample time to get dressed, eat breakfast, and gather their things before they head out. If they ride a school bus, they'll need to be ready when the bus comes by. However, if you take them to school their morning may have a little more flexibility in their schedule.

For younger children it might be a good idea to create a chart of things they need to do each day. You may want to use pictures to create a "to-do" list with the following items:

- * Get dressed – picture of clothing: shirt, pants, socks and shoes
- * Eat breakfast – picture of food
- * Brush teeth – picture of toothbrush and toothpaste
- * Get ready to go – picture of backpack and lunch bag

Older children may not need the pictures, but having a list of what they need to do each day may still be helpful. This may be posted in several places including their bedroom, the bathroom and the refrigerator so they don't have to keep running through the house to figure out what's next. Place the list in a sheet protector so they can cross or check the items off.

Medical experts and nutritionists espouse the benefits of eating a healthy breakfast each morning. Not only does breakfast give the body the energy it needs after a long period of no nutrients, it also helps people focus. Experts describe how eating breakfast each morning can improve a child's concentration and allow them to do better in school.

If your child doesn't want a full breakfast, find foods they can eat quickly but will still provide the nutrients their body needs. Most experts recommend eating a serving of protein first thing in the morning. Scrambled eggs can be placed on toast or they could eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on whole wheat bread. You can also give them yogurt with a piece of fruit. Be creative when trying to find something for your child to eat at breakfast.

Don't forget to put any dishes you used for breakfast in the dishwasher. If you don't have one of those, scrape off the extra food, rinse the dishes and stack them in the sink. Run a sink of hot, soapy water to allow the dishes to soak while you're away for the day. This will make cleaning the dishes easier when you get back to them.

Leave the house with plenty of time to arrive at school on time. This may mean going out to warm up the car in colder weather. If you can leave a little bit early it may be better. You never know when you'll have a flat or traffic will be worse than usual.

After school routines are important, too

Afternoon routines are going to look different for each family. Both parents may work in one family and the children don't go home directly after school. Other families may have a parent that doesn't work and is able to be home in the afternoon. Remember to create a schedule or routine which will best serve your family.

Don't feel you have to follow this, or any other routine you read about, if it doesn't work for your family. Feel free to make changes until you find what works for your family; then you can stick with that. Your goal is to develop a schedule which fits your family's needs not feel like you're fighting against something that simply doesn't work.

Your child may want to sit down in front of the television after they return from school, but that's not a good use of their time. You'll want to establish an after school routine, too. What would that routine look like?

Depending upon what time your children get home they may or may not have much time to relax. Give them a half hour or so to change clothes and get a healthy snack before sitting down to do homework. Even though a half hour doesn't seem like much time, it should be enough time for them to transition between being at school to being at home where they have more freedom.

For some parents it's not possible to be at home with their children as they get out of school. In this case you'll want to make other after school arrangements for them. Some options are to have them remain at the after school session, have a friend pick them up and take them home, or have a family member come and get them. Unless they are older, it isn't a good idea to allow children to remain at home by themselves; it simply isn't safe.

Even for children who are able to be at home alone, you'll want to establish specific rules. These will include keeping the doors and windows locked, remaining in the house, not answering the telephone or door while you're away and staying off the computer or internet when you're not home. It would also be a good idea for there to be a neighbor your child can check in with if they have any problems.

As far as what your child does when they get home, many parents and teachers recommend having children do homework shortly after returning. This means the information will be fresh in their minds and they'll be less likely to take a long time. The longer they wait to do homework the more information will begin to fade and the more difficulty they'll have completing it without help.

It is important to be available to your children while they're doing homework in case they need help. Suggest they work at the kitchen table so you can work on dinner while they're busy. You'll be right there with them and they'll be able to easily get your attention if they run into problems.

Let them take a break between subjects or at a minimum after they've worked for half an hour. Your family may ask everyone to chip in with chores. If this is the case, a break may be enough time to vacuum or take out the trash. After their chores are done they can get back to school work until dinner.

When dinner time arrives, ask your child to help you set the table. Enjoy a leisurely meal and each other. Talk about the day or what activities your child may want to be involved with. This will give you an idea of what changes you'll need to make to your routine.

It is also wise to have a specific time for each meal or snack while you're at home. Having meals at a set time each day will accomplish a couple of things. Your children will know when they're eating. They'll know what time they have to be home each day. Regular meals and snacks will also help your children learn good eating habits.

Once the family has eaten and cleaned up you may want to include some family time before the children begin getting ready to settle in for the night. Watch a television program, play a board game or do something which will be relaxing for everyone. You may want to have a family read-

aloud time. Find a classic story everyone likes and read it together. This should provide a time for closeness which can transition into your nightly routine.

When it's time for the children to get ready for bed, use the routine you've been working on for the last couple of weeks. Continue to use that routine as long as it works for you. Make adjustments when necessary but try to keep it consistent. Remember, this routine will prepare them for a good night's sleep which translates to a rested child and a good morning.

Scheduling after school activities

It may be worth restricting television and computer time until all school work is completed. Even when there is free time after homework is done you may still want to limit time with electronics. With video tape and digital recorders available today, there's no reason you can't record things you want to watch and then do so at your convenience. You also reduce watching time by forwarding through commercials.

Some families will allow children to be involved in any number of extracurricular activities. If time together as a family is important to you, you may want to restrict your child from being involved in too many activities per school semester. Take time to find out which activities are truly important to your child and then try to work those into your family's routine.

If they want to play a sport it is wise to discuss the amount of time it will take. Not only will they be required to practice there will also be games to attend. Sometimes the games will require traveling to a different school. The same would also be true for playing in the band. All of these things will need to be taken into account before deciding which activities your child will do.

At the beginning of the school year you may want to sit down as a family and talk about everything which would take time from everyone's schedule. List each person and known activities they'll have. This could include business meetings, extracurricular school activities, volunteering as a family, religious activities if applicable, and vacations.

When the list is complete, try creating a centralized calendar which will be available to everyone. Plug in each activity using a specific color for each person. When the activities are all written down, you can see how busy your family will be. You may decide everyone is too busy and cut back on some things.

Plan one day a month to go over the centralized family calendar. Ask each family member if the routines you've established are working for them. Are there some things which work well? What about things which aren't working? Decide as a family how to make changes to the routine to better fit for everyone.

Your goal in creating a good back to school routine is to get in the habit of doing certain things at specific times. Once you have the routine in place, you'll want to follow it. This will make your day run smoother as well as allow everyone to know what to expect. While it is true there may be times when you can't follow the routine exactly as planned, having a routine or schedule will become a source of stability for your family.

When the months pass and it's time to return to school again, having a good routine going can be a godsend. Routines help us know what to expect each day, they help us prepare for the next and they can help everyone be more organized as well as prepare them for the future. Children may balk at the prospect of returning to school in the fall however, they'll soon get back into the swing of things. Before you know it, your home and your child will be running smoothly.