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Back To School



A Guide To Making The Transition Back Into School
Easier On The Whole Family.

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Introduction

Can you believe that summer is almost over? The past weeks have just been flying by and it's time to get the kids ready to go back to school. It's time to buy them new clothes and get school supplies. Now is also a great time to start getting back into your old routines and get the kids ready to go back to sitting still and learning.

In the following pages, you'll find information on anything from getting the kids ready in the morning and preparing a healthy breakfast and lunch for them to extracurricular activities, chores your kids can (and should) do and how to help your child deal with bullies.

Enjoy

Christine Steendahl

"The Menu Mom"

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A Stress Free Morning Routine for Back to School

Let's go! Let's go! Come on ... you're going to miss the bus! I don't know where your favorite jeans are; it's not my responsibility. What do you mean you still have homework? Did you brush your teeth yet? Let's go! I'm leaving... NOW!

Oh I hope your mornings don't sound like that above. If it does, it's not too late to turn that ship around. The key to having a stress free morning routine is to have a smooth bedtime routine. Remember, a routine is something that is followed regularly, standard procedures. Without the consistency you will have an uphill battle.

Here are some tips to a stress free morning routine:

- No yelling. Raising your voice, albeit frustrated, is only going to escalate matters.
- Early to bed, early to rise. That one is simple.
- Showers and baths should be taken at night. You think you'll have time in the morning, but you rarely do.
- Look over all homework for completeness before bed; don't assume it's finished.
- Before bed, ensure lunches are made, backpack is packed and there are no surprise "Oh I need ... today!"
- Give singular instructions. Don't say, "I want you to finish your homework, eat breakfast, get dressed, comb your hair, brush your teeth and be in the car by 8:15." To a child, that sounds like "blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah." One instruction at a time works wonders.
- Provide instructions once. If you're doing this, stop: "Johnny, it's time to get dressed." Two minutes later, "Johnny, we're going to be late if you don't get dressed now." Two more minutes later, "Johnny, honey, I told you to get dressed." "Johnny, Mommy is going to be late, now go get dressed." To a child



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that sounds like "Oh mom is good for asking about five more times before she really goes ballistic!" Repeated requests only send the message that junior doesn't really have to do it now.

- Set consequences and stick to your guns. If you tell your child the car is leaving at 8:15 sharp, make it happen. Clearly you can't leave your child behind, so leaving without her isn't an option. Tell her you will be leaving whether she is ready or not. Sending a 10 year old to school with uncombed hair, pajamas and an empty belly might be just the catalyst for change.

You are the parent; you set the tone for the morning routine. You need to be actively involved in the morning routine. Follow the steps above and I guarantee 'joy will come in the morning!'





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Energy Boosting Breakfast Ideas for Students

Running late for school yet again? Just give the kids a Pop Tart on the way out the door and they'll be fine. If you're all out of the sugary toaster treat, just swing through Krispy Kreme on the way and your offspring will be good to go. Right? Wrong! Wrong! And Wrong. You might as well give your children a cup of coffee if that's what you consider a good breakfast.

Well sure it's quick, convenient and tasty! In addition to lacking any nutritional value, the sugar buzz will quickly wear off and then your little one will fall asleep right before morning recess. So what about a bowl of cereal and a bagel? Nope, that's not much better; although some cold cereals are clearly better than others. You want to feed your children a nutritionally sound breakfast, complete with a source of protein.

Quick and convenient does not have to equate to a boatload of carbs and sugar. How many times have you heard, "breakfast is the most important meal of the day"? It's true; it sets the tone for the whole day. Children need to be able to focus, and they need to be awake.

Eggs are a great source of protein. If you don't have time to cook in the morning, then make some hard boiled eggs the night before. Those are quick and easy. You can also make fruit smoothies with yogurt and your children's favorite fruit. Add a little cinnamon and vanilla, and then pour it all in the blender.

How many years has Carnation Instant Breakfast been around? It's been around longer than most readers will remember. But there is good reason for their longevity. It's chock full of antioxidants (as much as a cup of green tea) and it has twice the protein of an egg and twice as much calcium as a 6 oz. container of fruited yogurt. It tastes like chocolate milk, but it's oh so much better.

Maybe your child just isn't a breakfast person. Who says you have to eat typical breakfast food in the morning? Have you read "101 Delicious Chicken Recipes?" If your student likes chicken, serve up a 3 oz. chicken breast for breakfast. There's no rule against it. And it's a nutritionally sound breakfast, complete with a source of protein.

Don't forget to put a small baggie full of almonds in your child's backpack. Nuts are also a great convenient, energy boosting addition to breakfast. Just say 'No' to sugary toaster treats!



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Money Saving Lunch Ideas for Back to School

Hot lunch at school can become quite expensive. Figure on average, hot lunch costs \$2.10 per day if you include milk with the meal. If you have three children, \$6.30 a day, multiplied by five days, that's \$31.50 a week... just for lunch! Is it convenient for parents? You betcha. Can it be expensive? You betcha!

I'm going to give you some excellent money saving lunch ideas. It's important to remember that you must not embarrass your children with the lunch you force them to take (egg salad sandwiches aren't real popular in school). You need to come up with some fun, tasty meals that will make your child the envy of the lunch table. The object here is to save money and ensure your well thought-out lunch doesn't end up at the bottom of the trash barrel.

I remember a day when it was cool to bring a thermos to school. Mine had My Little Ponies (the original ones) and my brother's was Lost in Space. Kid's thermoses are quite adorable, however a word of caution: they don't keep hot foods as hot as the trusty metal and glass thermoses. Just be certain to preheat the thermos with boiling water, and then put the hot food directly into the thermos. Your hot food should stay warm until lunch time, four hours later.

Leftovers make great thermos food. Make sure you get a wide mouth, shorter thermos. You could fill it with soup, stew, mac and cheese, hamburger helper, chili, spaghetti and even hotdogs. Another idea is to fill the thermos with taco meat with the cheese already added. Then put a hard taco shell or a soft tortilla into the lunch bag and your bambino is ready for a fiesta!

Of course you could also serve cold lunches in the thermos. How about tuna salad, macaroni salad, or spaghetti salad? Or fill it with antipasto – variety of meats and cheeses. Don't forget about celery and peanut butter or crackers and cheese. Roll-ups go over well, too. There are a couple different variations: Cream cheese spread on a slice of salami, with a sweet pickle inside; or instead of rolling up a slice of salami, roll up a tortilla that is stuffed with ham and shredded cheese.

Forget those pre-made lunches in a cardboard box. Forget the standard PBJ. Think out of the box. Economical can also be fun. Your child's friends will try to trade their lunch for the fun meal you packed!



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Working Moms can Help Out at School too

"But Mommmmm, why can't you come to the party today? Sierra's Mom ALWAYS comes."

That's a question working moms would rather not have to answer. Of course they would love to be able to be available for every field trip and holiday party. Mom wouldn't mind having all the little classmates see her in the library and say "Hi Suzy's mom." Nonetheless, for variety of reasons, that simply is not always possible.

There are however, a number of ways that working moms can help out at school. If it isn't feasible to actually go to the building before or after school or during lunch, there are plenty of projects that can be done at home. Teachers always have lots of paper that needs to be cut. Remember where you put your scissors?

If you aren't available to be at school on the actual day of the party; there is still much pre-planning that you can do. The younger children usually have a craft, a game and a snack at their parties. You could volunteer to send juice boxes, cupcakes or plates and napkins to school. The room parent in charge of coordinating the party would be ever grateful if you took on the task of providing a craft for each child to do.





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For a fun easy winter craft send enough pinecones so that each child gets one. Then send a jar of peanut butter, a box of Dixie cups and a box of plastic knives. Next, at home put a scoop of bird seed into individual zip lock baggies. Finally cut one strand of yarn for each child. The children will tie the yard into a loop at the top of their pinecone. Next they will spread peanut butter on the pinecone, put it into their baggie full of birdseed and then shake. Voila' you've just provided a birdfeeder craft. The party committee will appreciate it more than you know.

You could also help out at the school carnival or music programs. Most of those events are usually at night, and may fit into your schedule better. Parents are often needed at evening sporting events too. Concession stands always need smiling faces to serve up hot dogs.

An often overlooked area of consideration is simply calling the teacher. Tell him/her that you'd love to help but that your schedule doesn't allow you to come in during the day. Guaranteed the teacher will have no problem giving you something to do.

So the next time your child asks you why you can't be at the party, remind her of the twenty six paper teddy bears you just cut out so that her whole class could enjoy learning about hibernation!



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Get To Know Your Kid's Teachers

By definition, a teacher is one who teaches. Ya .. so? Let's look at what it means to teach. The dictionary defines the verb teach as:

- To impart, provide or instruct knowledge or skill
- To condition to a certain action or frame of mind
- To cause to learn by example or experience
- To advocate or preach
- To carry on instruction on a regular basis in

That last one, to carry on instruction on a regular basis, is a biggie...on a regular basis. On average teachers will spend 30 hours a week with your elementary age child. In contrast, let's look at the amount of time you will spend, with your child during an average school week. Between getting up, dressed, fed and teeth brushed, on average, a parent will spend 10 minutes actually with the child.

Then there's after school - it's probably at least 5:00 pm before you really spend time with your child; either due to your schedule or your child's. (Note: Seeing your child and spending time with – are not synonymous). Then maybe you spend some time together preparing and eating dinner. After school and after work you may have taken junior to practice or the store, or there was more homework.

If your child is like most, a bath or shower is probably needed. After that, perhaps a bedtime snack, a little TV and then it's time to start the bedtime routine. It's safe to say, on average, parents will spend less than eight (8) hours a week interacting with their elementary age child. Now do you see why it is vital to get to know your kid's teachers?



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Most schools have an Open House prior to the first day of school. This gives the parent and child a chance to meet the teacher and vice versa. Make every effort to attend this Open House. If you have a schedule conflict you cannot rearrange, make an appointment before or after school to meet your child's teacher. It may only take a quick 10 minute visit initially, but don't you want to know who will be imparting, providing and instructing knowledge and skills to your child?

Teachers will almost always provide phone numbers and emails where they can be reached. Nearly all of them will give you their home number. Use this contact information! Many parents think, "Oh I don't want to bother the teacher by calling him/her." Bother? Staying informed about what is happening with your child thirty hours each week should by no means be considered, "bothering the teacher." Parents have a duty to know what is going on!



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Easy Afternoon Snacks Kids Love

Remember how June Cleaver always had fresh cookies that just came out of the oven when Wally and Beaver arrived home from school? (If you don't remember that, you might be able to catch some reruns of *Leave it to Beaver* on Nick at Night or TVLand!)

Anyway, who doesn't like fresh cookies just out of the oven? However, even if you don't fancy yourself a June Cleaver, you can still make easy afternoon snacks that your kids will love. By the time they get off the bus or walk in the door they're so hungry they could eat dirt. You're probably familiar with the well-known picture of your children standing in front of the refrigerator, door wide open, staring inside for something delightful to jump out.

Of course they'd probably love to grab an ice cream sandwich, instead of an apple; a bag of chips over a bag of rice cakes. Give them a snack that's quick, nutritional and something they'll want. Here are a few suggestions:

Freeze bite size chunks of fruit. Watermelon, pineapple and apple slices tossed into a bag and then into the freezer make a refreshing, crunchy snack. The trick is that you want to have something convenient. They're hungry – you don't (and neither do they) want to have to make something after school. Have it ready to pop into their mouth.

You can make a variety of kabobs. Adults usually like some meat chunks, with a little onion, green pepper and pineapple on their skewer, then onto the grill. Kids want something different. Marshmallows, cheese, grapes, apple wedges, pineapple, banana slices, pretzels, and slices of rolled up ham or turkey are choice ingredients to stack your kabobs. Have those waiting in the refrigerator when the kids get home and you'll hear no whines of "There's nothing to eeeeeeeeat!"

If you're totally at a loss for creativity, then use some fun bowls, plates or cups. Serve fresh fruit in a margarita glass. Put Goldfish crackers in a goldfish bowl and use a fish net to scoop out the yummy aquatic crackers. Use a new net, of course... not the one you use for Gill!

Imagine the look on your kids' face when they come home to find an ice cream cone stuffed with Waldorf salad: Carrots, celery, apple, walnuts, and raisins with a touch of mayonnaise and lemon juice. You've heard that variety is the spice of life. Your kids will concur. You don't want the same old – same old, and neither do they.



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The Homework Routine That Works

At the beginning of the school year you set the rule: Homework gets finished as soon as you get home from school. But by October, that rule doesn't seem to be as hard and fast as it was in August.

If you don't rein in the lax homework routine, before you know it you'll be hearing those panicked cries at 7:30 a.m. that homework isn't finished. Or worse yet, you'll get the dreaded phone call from the teacher notifying you that your little angel hasn't been turning in her homework. Heaven forbid you don't find out about the missed assignments until you attend parent/teacher conferences!

No worries. The problem doesn't usually lie with formatting a good routine; rather it's with enforcing the routine. If you're fortunate enough to be home with your child after school, it is a little easier to ensure the homework routine is maintained. If you don't see your child for an hour or so after he's been home, you can still follow through.

The rules should be simple enough to leave no room for misunderstandings.

1. Grab an after school snack then start homework.
2. TV stays off until all homework is finished and reviewed for completeness.
3. No extracurricular activity until all homework has been completed.

Number three tends to be a difficult one for parents to enforce. We tend to over book our children's schedule. Number three, no extracurricular activity until all homework has been completed, means just that. It doesn't mean the rule can be relaxed if junior has tae kwon do after school or if Suzy has gymnastics. It doesn't mean it's ok to take a pass on number three on days when Johnnie has T-ball practice.

Perhaps you decided that you paid good money for lessons and Suzy, Junior and Johnnie will participate. Okay, but what kind of example is that setting? How about if you take your child to the activity, but she must sit out until the homework has been finished. Then she's welcome to join the other kids on the balance beam.

Remember you still have dinner and a bedtime routine too. Children should worry about being children, not about juggling schedules. Make sure your child has a snack so that his stomach's growling won't be a distraction. After homework is finished he can enjoy what little time is left in the evening. If you stick to rules one, two and three above, you're on track for a great school year!



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Teach Your Student Gadget Etiquette

Mention a Walkman, cassette player or a transistor radio and your children look at you like you're a dinosaur. Whip off terms like iPod, Mp3 player, cell phone, two-way, PSP, Gameboy, Nintendo DS, and Blackberry (no, it's not fruit!), then they'll think they have one dope parent. (dope – that's a good thing!)

Back in the day when I was a kid, wait – stop. How did I get old enough to say things like, "back in the day..."? Anyway...when I was growing up we never had such high tech gadgets. And what's with ear buds, anyway? The ear phones I used to have looked similar to what the baggage handlers now wear on the tarmac at the airport to absorb the noise from the jets!

As I was saying, about all these gadgets - they even make backpacks with tiny compartments specifically for individual gadgets. Whether you like it or not, iPods, Mp3 players, cell phones, two-ways, PSPs, Gameboys, Nintendo DS', Blackberries (no, not the fruit!) and all those yet to be released are here to stay. As a parent, it's your responsibility to teach your student gadget etiquette.

It's interesting that backpack manufacturers are developing products that allow easier use of gadgets, yet most schools now prohibit said items. Check your school's student handbook. There is likely a section in there that reads similarly:

"No radios, tape players, pagers, cell phones etc. of any kind will be allowed on campus. These will be confiscated and not returned until the end of the school day. Upon repeated offenses, items will be confiscated and not returned until a parent or guardian comes for a conference or until the end of the year."

Whether or not your school actually has a similar policy, you could and should enforce one within your household. Those gadgets are expensive and they don't have a place at school. I don't have to tell you that it's not a good thing if your child is listening to music when she should be listening to the teacher.

Sadly, your student should be aware of the real possibility of theft. He'd be pretty bummed if his iPod turned up missing. It is just a good idea to leave all gadgets at home. If your student must have one of them with him, reinforce that it must be OFF (as in the case of a cell phone).

That said; remind your student that good old fashioned paper books are still very much permitted. One on one active listening and two-way conversations are still a positive



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interaction. And sometimes simply being still can do wonders for a child. Leave the gadgets at home!

Dads Are Cool When They Help Out At School

"My dad can beat up your dad!" Oh yeah? "Well my dad is cooler than your dad!"

One thing about most kids, they're loyal to their dads. It doesn't matter how much he's working or how he may not be able to throw a ball or ride bikes because he's working on Mom's honey-do list, most children think their dad is pretty wonderful.

Often the room parents and those parents who are available to help out at school are the moms. Many dads would love to help out at school if their schedules were a little more flexible. Imagine the excitement on your child's face if Dear old Dad was one of the chaperones on the next field trip.

Dads may not have the flexibility that the work-at-home-moms do to help out at school, but most dads I know are entitled to a lunch each day as well as some vacation days each year.

If logistics permit it, dads should schedule their lunch break at the school a couple times a month. They could help out in the school store, in the classroom or media center. Your child will be proud as a peacock!

A sad reality is that there are more and more single parent households. Some children don't see their dad nearly as often as they would like. I remember one field trip to an apple orchard. Dad rearranged his schedule so he could attend and help rally the children. While sitting on the hay ride you would have thought he was a local celebrity. Kids were fighting over who could sit next to "The Dad".

It's good for children to see dads participate with school activities. Dads are cool when they help out at school. Don't negate the possibility helping just because dad works when school is in session. Maintenance man Mr. Bob would love a hand setting up for the school carnival. Do you realize how many tables and stations need to be set up?

The next time you overhear a group of children trying to one-up each other where their dads are concerned, perhaps you'll hear one bragging, "Oh yeah? Well MY dad helps out at school!" Do you know any cool dads?



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Friendships at School: A Primer for Parents

"Ashley's not my friend anymore! I hate her!" Whoa, before you go off on a tirade because your six year old used the word hate, take a minute to find out why she is feeling such a strong emotion.

Good, bad or ugly, friendships at school are a magnificent necessity in your child's development. As a parent, it's your duty to foster that development. Since the day your baby was born, your first responsibilities were to feed and protect your young. That started the bonding process – the needed link for balanced development.

Watch the motherly instinct that surfaces when a mom finds out someone hurt her baby, even if it was that someone said something mean to her. Forget the sticks and stone, words DO hurt. We want to protect our children from skinned knees and broken hearts. But the fact is we are not training them up in the way they should go if we don't allow them to experience a little pain. It's a necessary evil in life.

Let your baby cry on your shoulder. Welcome the opportunity to use the experience as a springboard to talk about friendships at school. Look back at your own high school yearbook. How many of your friends signed it, "BFF" (Best Friends Forever) yet twenty years have passed and you haven't seen them since graduation day?

It's your responsibility to explain to your child that friendships are fragile. Everyone wants to be loved and accepted. Boys are not exempt from friendship woes; it just tends to be more dramatic with little girls.

Perhaps Martin Luther King didn't have the elementary school drama in mind when he said, "Can't we just all get along," but the emotion was likely similar. It's heart wrenching to hear your child lament how Katie was her best friend, but then Shannon had to come along and ruin it. "Now Shannon and Katie are best friends and they don't include me!"

While explaining the facts of fickle friendships may not fix things for your child, she may actually hear you now and listen to you later. Parents have a natural instinct to fix things and make their baby's life easier. Acknowledge your child's broken heart and use the tender moment as a learning experience.



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Bully Proof Your Student

It probably started in preschool when your son was playing with the truck and a big mean four and a half year old just came over and stole that dump truck right out of your sweet innocent little man's precious little hands. How dare he?!

The fact is, kids can be mean. Shoot, adults can be mean too. Why do you think someone created the bumper sticker, "Mean people suck"? You can't be with your child 24/7 to protect him from the school bully. You can't control what other children do; but you can control how your child reacts. Or at least hopefully you can bully proof your student.



For starters you want to ensure your precious baby isn't on the giving end of the bullying. Not only is it rude and wrong, it could land your assertive child a suspension. (Assertive sounds so much better than aggressive, don't you agree?)

You would do well to explain the psychology of a school bully before your child is faced with a situation where he (or she) is the one being bullied. The "do unto others rule" is a good place to start. You can also explain that often children act like a bully to mask other feelings (anger, disappointment etc.) If your student isn't doing anything intentional to egg on the rough and tough, the odds are in his favor he may not be a target.



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Only you know whether or not your child is mature enough to understand what makes a bully act in a certain manner. If you still have "a situation" even after you've thoroughly and repeatedly discussed how to play nice and how to avoid instigating any negative playground behavior, it's time for Plan B.

Make sure that your child's teacher is aware of the situation. That's not considered tattling; it's your responsibility. Often school can and should put an end to it once they become aware. Ok, so you tried all that and it still didn't stop? Assuming you already had the discussions about defending, not offending; using words not violence, then as a last resort your child should feel free to defend himself. While most parents teach their child that fighting is bad, getting the snot kicked out of you is bad too.

If you personally don't have the knowledge to equip your child, then enroll him in a martial arts class. There is absolutely no correlation between children becoming violent after attending a few self defense lessons. Don't you want to bully proof your student?

With all that said, remind your child that the easiest way to remedy the situation may be to befriend the bully.



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Make This Year Better Than Last Year

Remember that incident from last year? You do? Then it's time to put it behind you. It's history! If last year wasn't such a good school year for your child, you should be even more bound and determined to make this year better than last year!

"But you just don't understand. Last year this happened or my child ..." Unless something tragic and life changing happened last year in school, then it's safe to say, it doesn't really matter what happened last year, this is a new year; a fresh year.

You may not always be able to change circumstances. However you (and your child) have complete control to change your reactions to situations. Let's take a few examples of what may have happened last year to make it not so good.

1. Embarrassment – It's tough being a kid. Things cause us to be mortified. Ever wet your pants in school? I did. I wanted to die. I thought I'd never live it down. I'm pretty sure I'm the only person on the planet who remembers that. Teach your child to try to make light of embarrassing situations. Sure that's easier said than done, but if he can laugh with others, it won't be so traumatic.
2. Friendship woes. She's not my friend anymore. I was the only person not invited to the party! I can't believe she said that to me. Unfortunately, hurt feelings are a part of life. Acknowledge your child's feelings and put it behind you – it's a new year.
3. Situation with a teacher. I heard of one 4th grader who didn't report to the safety meeting at the end of the school year. He told the teacher/coordinator that he forgot about the meeting and asked if he could still be a safety. The teacher said no because the student didn't demonstrate responsibility. The child fretted for weeks that he'd actually be assigned to that teacher the following year. In his mind, "he hated that teacher". Guess what? That child was in that teacher's class. And that child ended up loving the teacher and having an excellent year.

Remind your child that things are not always as bad as they seem. Remind them that things have a way of working out. Remind them to worry about nothing. Ninety percent of the things we worry about never happen; and as for the other ten percent, it's out of our span of control anyway.

Make a conscious decision to have a better year this year!



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When You Don't Like Your Child's Teacher

You're hoping, praying and crossing your fingers that your child gets Mrs. Smith for 2nd grade. You've heard so many wonderful things about her and you just know that is the best teacher for your child.

However the notice comes home that next year your child is assigned to Mr. Jones' class. Ugh! That's not what you wanted. You just don't think your child will be as happy in that class. Before you decide that second grade will be a horrid experience, let's examine your feelings toward your child's new teacher.

Is it that you really don't like your child's new teacher? Or is it that you like the other teacher better? Do you have any firsthand knowledge or experience with either teacher? Sometimes it's easy to be fond of one particular teacher, either because of the good things you've heard or because your older child had that teacher. But is that fair to the new teacher?

Did you have a bad experience with the new teacher? Or did some of the other mothers just gossip about how strange that particular teacher is. Consider this: there are an abundance of teachers out of work. If your school had a teacher that was as horrible as the rumors state, don't you think that teacher would be let go? Sure there's tenure and all that, but there are too many unemployed good teachers, for a system to hang onto a bad apple.

Or perhaps that new teacher actually did something you don't agree with. Keep in mind that there is no perfect teacher. Unless you feel that the teacher made a decision that is grossly misaligned with your beliefs, is it something you can live with? If not, make an immediate appointment with the teacher to discuss it. If you still are not satisfied, go to the principal.

All I'm saying is give the teacher a chance. Give him a chance to prove your preconceived notions false. Give him a chance to discuss the situation (which caused your dislike). Most schools will be reasonable with you if you are reasonable with them. Make sure you have data as to why you would like a different teacher for your child. "Because you like Mrs. Smith better" is unlikely to get your child switched into a different classroom.

Lastly, keep in mind that if you prayed that your child would be assigned the teacher best suited for him, then likely that is the teacher your child will have.



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Extracurricular Scheduling - Are Your Kids Too Busy?

Does your daughter's schedule look anything like this?

Monday: Band practice, school, dance class

Tuesday: School, tae kwon do

Wednesday: Band practice, school, cheerleading practice

Thursday: School, tae kwon do

Friday: Band practice, school, football game

Saturday: Gymnastics, karate tournaments

Sunday: Church, go to friends

Whoa! I hope not. What is missing in that schedule? Where does homework, family time, relaxing, reading, meals, being a kid and sleep fit into that schedule? Don't tell me – your child wants to do all that, right?





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Or maybe all those extracurricular activities were your idea. You only want what's best for your child. If she is going to make the Varsity Cheerleading squad and take State Championship in Martial arts it's going to take some dedication.

Hello! Your child is ten! Let her be a child. Growing up goes way too fast, don't hurry it along. Children need to be children while they can. Once they hit high school there will be much more pressure to excel because college will be right around the corner.

Children should have two main responsibilities: Being a child and being a student. How can they become proficient in either if they are over scheduled, over worked and constantly on the go?

Sure extracurricular activities can have a very positive influence on your child's development. But so can good grades and quality family time. What would happen if you limited your child's extracurricular events to just one activity? Let her chose the one after school activity to participate in.

It may not be a popular decision, but it's a wise decision. Do you want to be your child's friend or your child's parent? Explain that it is not a punishment. Remember you don't have to justify your actions. What you do need to do is make the best choices for your children while they are still young. Doing so will equip them to make their own smart decisions later in life.

Make a commitment to limit the extracurricular activities this school year. Or perhaps give it a six month trial. You may find parking Mom's Taxi for a while is good for everyone in the family!



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Evening Chaos: Menu Planning Can Help

How often does one get to come home from school or work and have a relaxing evening filled with nothing else to do except to chill out? Ha! Almost never, right?

Usually it looks something like this – 4:00 pm, get home from school, grab a snack, change clothes, start on homework. But then Mom has to run to the grocery store and stop at the another store to get the thing you need for school tomorrow, and little brother needs to be picked up from Billy's house. Mom, I'm hungry. One more stop, then we can go home. Ok, once home, what do you want to eat? Ah shoot, who drank the last of the milk. What do you mean we don't have any cheese left? Ok, we'll just have to have sandwiches because you have to be at Girl Scouts by 6:30. Where's the peanut butter?

The above scene doesn't sound too enjoyable to me. I used to think mornings were about the worst time of the day; getting everyone up, fed, dressed and to school on time. But I've had a change of heart. Evenings can be even more chaotic. One easy method to simply your evenings is to plan your meals in advance. A little menu planning can help immensely.

Whatever day you typically go to the grocery store, that's the day you will plan your entire week's evening meals. Most people need to stop at the store at least once during the week for more bread or milk; I'm not referring to that trip to the store.



Once you know what you're having for dinner each day, you can plan ahead to ensure there is cheese in the refrigerator for the ham and cheese sub sandwiches. One suggestion is to use colored stickers. If you have certain items that you need to have available to complete a meal, put a sticker on the food item. That will let family members know to pick something else to snack on because it's a little hard to make tuna salad if there isn't any tuna.

Prepare as much as you can in advance. Perhaps you'll brown the ground sirloin for the spaghetti sauce and pop it into the freezer for a few days. Or if you have a few spare moments in the morning (ha! What's a spare morning moment, right?) but as I was saying, toss a meal in the crock pot and turn it on low so it simmers all day. It'll be ready to eat the moment you walk in the door.



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Simplification is the key. A few minutes of preparation will save you oodles of frustration later! Or just subscribe to a menu planning service like [Menu Planning Central](#).

Your Child is Never too Young for Chores

Chores, that's an interesting topic of discussion. Some parents will tell you that it's so much more efficient if they just do the household duties. They can do them so much faster.

Sometimes what you desire most can be the most difficult. This is especially true in the area of delegating. You aren't training your children up in the way they should go if you don't teach them responsibility. Will you still pick up after them when they move into their own apartment?

I saw a sign hanging in an office break room that read, "Your Mother Doesn't Work Here – Clean Up Your Own Mess." There must be a reason such a sign was ever created. Your child is never too young for chores.

From the time your child can walk and understand basic commands you can start teaching the fine art of putting things away. "Put your cup on the table for Mommy." Younger children are capable of helping feed the pets, putting clothes away (or at least in the vicinity they belong) and can certainly find the toy box to pick up after playing.

Other areas younger children may be able to help with include bringing their own laundry basket into their room and cleaning countertops with paper towels. You'll find that children really want to help. They feel grown up and special helping mommy and daddy.

As the children age, you'll need to increase their responsibilities. By the time they are five they should be able to help quite a bit in the kitchen. They can help mix baking items; set the table, clear the table; and load and empty dishwasher. Children even enjoy dusting. It's really a shame that enthusiasm doesn't carry over into adult life!



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First through fifth graders ought to be able to let pets outside (and back in again) as well as take the pets for a walk. They'll get excited about the opportunity of making you a meal (be prepared for toast, an apple, a piece of cheese and some grapes, but it'll be the best you've ever had.)



It doesn't matter if they leave your car soap streaked from washing it. They're learning and you're teaching. They're old enough to push a vacuum, a snow shovel and a rake. What's one chore many adults will tell you they like the least? Putting away laundry is high on that list. Teach your elementary aged child to fold and hang up the laundry and you'll set a good lifelong pattern.

If you invest a little patience and time providing proper instruction, you'll be helping yourself and your child develop into well rounded adults!



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Charts for Bedtime and Morning Routines

"What do you mean you forgot to do that?" I told you last night before you went to bed. Well you better hurry or you're going to miss the bus."

How smoothly your bedtime routine goes will determine how smoothly your morning goes. It's important to have routines for bedtime as well as in the morning. The best way to keep track of needed tasks is to use a chart.

If you leave it to your memory or that of your children, something will slip through the cracks. In this fast paced world we live in, and with children's developing brains, someone will forget. I don't know about you, but if something simple at night can make my mornings run smoother, I'm all for it.

There are a couple different options you can use with regard to charts. One method would be to list each item that needs to be completed in a separate line on the chart. You could list tasks such as homework completed, lunch made, backpack packed, clothes picked out, showered, teeth brushed. Whereas the morning chart would be dressed, lunch out of refrigerator, teeth brushed, and dog fed. Each task could get a check mark or a sticker – depending on the age of the children.

Another option would be to list all that needs to be accomplished on a separate piece of paper or chart. Leave that on the refrigerator or some accessible location. Then once the children have completed all their assigned tasks, one gold star, sticker or check mark could be placed on the calendar.

It doesn't really matter what system you use – as long as it works for your family. You may get some resistance when you introduce it. Or you may be pleasantly surprised and the kids will look forward to not only completing their assignments but seeing the acknowledgement for a job well done.

There may be a transition time necessary for both parents and children. That is to be expected anytime a new routine is introduced. Hold each other accountable. Allow them to remind you if you get "too busy" to follow through with the chart.

Make sure you catch them doing something right. Your entire family will benefit from well organized bedtime and morning routines!



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Choosing the Right Afterschool Activities for your Child

What happens after school is equally as important as what takes place during the school day. It's important that you and your child choose the right after school activities. Obviously as the parent, you'll be the one making the decisions. However if you can include your child in the process, you'll have better buy-in.

If your child has sports practice, dance lessons or choir practice, there will be other adults present. That's a good thing. Dropping your child off at the mall isn't such a good idea. If children have nothing to do, the potential for trouble is much higher.

Walking around the mall isn't really considered, "something to do." If you want to go to the mall with your child, that's great. What I'm referring to is your child taking the bus or getting dropped off, without an adult there to accompany her.

One third of shoplifters apprehended are teens age 13-17. Not suggesting that all teens are out to shoplift, just merely that the opportunity is greater when kids are wandering the mall un-chaperoned, with nothing to do.

Another not so hot idea is dropping your child off at a movie theater. Unless you've seen the movie he wants to see, you haven't approved the content. Besides there are much better things your child could do with his time than sit and watch a movie.

If they want to go to a friend's house after school, make sure an adult will be present. By "making sure" I don't mean asking your child if the friend's parent will be home. Get a home phone number (not a cell phone number) and talk to the mother. You'd be surprised at the number of times the other parent didn't even know the children were planning to be together.

Many schools now have after school care which basically means your child can stay at school until you can pick her up. This gives them a chance to get homework done and play in the gym, in the presence of an adult.

Children grow up way too fast. Make sure they are using their time wisely. Remember, they are our future generation!



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Moms, It's ok to Say "No"

"I just want my child to have it better than I did." "I want them to have nice things."

Wanting what's best for your child and handing the world to them on a silver platter are two entirely different animals.

Whether we're talking about material items or privileges, children want and need boundaries. They need to understand the value of a buck and understand that they don't always get their own way.

"Remember, parenting has to do with more than the present. You are preparing your child for the future. A person's character is one's destiny. Boundaries are the key to making any relationship work." - Dr. Henry Cloud, Dr. John Townsend, authors of *Boundaries with Kids, When to say Yes, and How to say No*.

Mom's it's ok to say "no". You really aren't doing them any favors by caving in all the time. Granted, sometimes it's easier to say no. How many of us have had screaming children in stores. In the midst of their temper tantrum you know if you just concede and let him have that toy, he'll be quiet and the other customers will stop looking at you. Don't do it Mom.

You will send a message that all junior has to do is make a ruckus and you'll say yes. It's ok to say no, Mom. Don't be concerned with what other people think, it's your child and it's your responsibility to train him up in the way he should go.

Fast forward a few years and your pre-teen had plans to go to the skating party. But she didn't bring her grades up, as agreed. You told her that if she didn't, she wasn't going to be allowed to go to the party. Ever experience a rant from an eleven year old girl? It's not pretty. You know she had her heart set on it. The cow tears are flying and it's breaking your heart to have to ground her from going. Maybe she could start her punishment after the party.

Don't do it Mom. Stick to your guns. Remember when your parents had to punish you and Dad would say, "This hurts me more than it does you"? We could never quite understand that. But as a parent, you know how hard it is to say no to your child.

No one said child rearing was a pain-free road. Children can bring you the most joy you've ever experienced – as well as the most pain. Do the right thing. Moms, it's ok to say no.



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Bedtime Routine to Give your Kids a Chance to Tell you About their School Day

"Ok, it's time to start getting ready for bed. After your bath, brush your teeth and get your pajamas on. It's getting late."

If you have a bedtime routine, pat yourself on the back. Bedtime routines are so vital, especially for young children. Consider adding one more step to your bedtime routine. Give your kids a chance to tell you about their school day.

Remember that if your child is in school all day, your teacher is with your son or daughter for an average of 30 hours a week. That's almost the equivalent of a full work week. You've missed quite a bit of time with your child.

Make an effort to keep the communication free flowing. If you set good habits while your child is young, it'll be easier to talk about just anything as the years pass. For starters, don't ask yes or no answers. You don't want to establish a nightly Q & A, but rather two-way communication.

Sometimes "tell me about your day" doesn't generate much conversation. You could begin with, "tell me five things that happened today; recess and lunch don't count." That is usually a great ice breaker. Kids learn real quickly that if you don't ask, they're not telling.

In addition to asking what was for lunch, ask who your child sat next to. Who did they play with at recess? What did that play during recess? Was anyone sick today? Did anything funny or embarrassing happen to anyone in school today?

Sometime it is difficult to keep track of the specials. By specials I mean: gym, music, art, computer lab, etc.; the extra classes that usually take place with a different teacher outside of the main classroom. Keep a cheat sheet if you need to; ask what activity they did in gym.

If you can get your child to tell you about someone who may have had a hard time (in gym, with math, with reading aloud, etc.) it is a great segue for a life lesson in difficulties and hurt feelings.

It really doesn't matter what you talk about; it's more important that you talk. Make talking about your kid's day a regular part of the bedtime routine, you'll be surprised what you learn!



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How Much Sleep does your Child Really Need

Why is it that when we get older we would give anything to go to bed early? Once you become a parent, you can count on always being tired. Yet children never want to sleep. Perhaps they're afraid they'll miss out on something.

Getting your children to bed at a decent hour can be a struggle that is accompanied by tenacious whining. "But I'm not tired. Why do I have to go to bed so early?" Some kids think they can negotiate bedtimes each year, as though it was a union contract up for renewal.

Here's an example of their reasoning. Kindergarten bedtime is 7:30 pm; so first grade should be 8:00 pm. You agree to give it a try. At the start of 2nd grade, your child announces that 8:30 pm should be permitted. And by 3rd grade your precious angel isn't hitting the sack until 9:00 pm. At this rate, your 6th grader will have lights out at 10:30 pm. That's way too late! If you continued in that mode, your high school senior wouldn't go to bed until 1:30 a.m.

In a study of 74 six- to twelve-year-olds, researchers found that the children generally had more trouble with their schoolwork and more attention problems during the week when they stayed up late each night. The study, published in the medical journal *Sleep*, included healthy grade-schoolers without sleep or academic problems. During one week, they followed their normal sleep routine, with younger children getting about 10 hours each night and older children getting 8 to 9 hours. On another week, the children stayed up later than usual and got only 6.5 to 8 hours of sleep, depending on their age. On a third week, all of the children followed an "optimized" sleep schedule and got no fewer than 10 hours of sleep per night. (Source: *SLEEP* Dec. 2005)

According to this study, an optimized sleep schedule consisted of no fewer than 10 hours of sleep per night. Okay, so let's back into that time frame. Your child starts school at 8:45 am. The bus picks her up at 8:15 am. You're outside with her by 8:10 am. She needs a good hour to really wake up, eat breakfast, get dressed and feed the dog.

If you wake her up at 7:00 am, she needs to be asleep no later than 9:00 pm. Many children don't fall asleep the minute their head hits the pillow. That said, a bed time of 8:00 pm or 8:30 pm is by no means unreasonable. So the next time your child tells you that he's not tired, you know that regardless of how he feels, his little body needs to be in bed!



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Helping your Teen to Make Good Choices at School

The key to helping your teen make good choices at school is to train him up in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it. The End.

Ha! Don't we wish it was that easy? Even with the best upbringing teens don't always make the best choices. Shoot, adults don't always make the best choices. So what can parents do to tip the scales in the teen's favor?

1. Talk Talk Talk. Even if your teen goes into silent mode, keep talking with your child.
2. Lead by example. You can't expect your teen to behave in a manner contrary to your own.
3. Depending on the situation, you may want to share some of your own examples of what happened when you didn't make good choices.
4. If your teen mentions that so and so was caught with drugs in his locker, or her friend had sex with someone she met at a party – don't immediately condemn or judge those people. Use their poor choices as a springboard for open dialog.
5. Make it easy for your teen to be honest with you. Reinforce that no matter what, you still love her.
6. Remind him that you'll be more disappointed if he lies to you, rather than by some behavior he chose to participate in.
7. Accept that your teen may make some poor choices. Let that experience be a lessons learned for both of you. Examine what led up to that decision.
8. Denial is not a river in Egypt. If you have blinders on, it's time to take them off. No teen is perfect. Look for warning signs.
9. Don't give your teen too many liberties. Respecting ones privacy is one thing, but you still need to be the parent. Once your teen moves out of the home, you won't have the authority you do now.
10. Give your teen unconditional love.

When storms come, don't waste oxygen with should haves and could haves. There's no point in playing the "it's all my fault" card. What benefit will that pity party bring?



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If your teen thinks she needs to be perfect, examine where that thought pattern originated. Some teens make poor choices because they rebel or because they don't feel they can live up to mommy's and daddy's expectations.

All you can do is your very best. You need to be able to look yourself in the mirror and know that you've provided your child with all the tools she needs to be a happy, well balanced teenager.



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Motivating your Child to Care about School

Wouldn't we all love to hear an enthusiastic "Great!" when you child is asked how school is going? Instead you might get an apathetic "It's ok" response. Or you may even get "it sucks!" How do you motivate you child to care about school?

The fact is your child may never love school. For some, academics come naturally, while others struggle throughout. You can't force the love of school, but you can encourage your child to care about his education.

I always knew growing up that I had to go to college. It wasn't an option in my family – I had to at least show up for the first day of college. My parents said that they had an obligation to ensure I had a good education and I had an obligation to get good grades.

When we'd see adult fast food workers or someone busting their hiney behind a deli counter, my parents would remind me the importance of career options. I learned that while there was nothing wrong with working in a cashier position, some people didn't have other options because they didn't have a college education.

I knew early on that I didn't want to spend my adult life flipping burgers. For me, that was motivation to care about school. For others, that motivation may not work. Some people are motivated by money.

Show your child different salaries of various careers. If she has aspirations of a six figure salary, she'll need to start laying the ground work now. Some children may not respond to any future aspirations. They are only concerned about the present.

You may not be able to get your child to love school, but perhaps you can help him not hate school. You know your child better than anyone. You know his likes and dislikes (if you don't, I strongly suggest you stop reading this article immediately and go hang out with your child!).

What is your child interested in? Good grades? Being able to participate in extra-curricular activities? Money? Future earnings? Find what makes your child tick and you'll have a head start in helping your child care about school!



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Food Allergies: What to Do when Your Child is the One Who Could Get Sick?

Eight hours later, she woke from her coma. She was in Emergency Room with her parents sitting by her side. She was dazed and confused. Earlier that day she was having an asthma attack, so one of her cabin-mates at camp shared some of her own medication to help her breathe. What no one knew was that the capsule was coated with egg whites. That is common in some medications to help make them more slippery and easy to swallow. The camper was highly allergic to eggs; and consequently went into anaphylactic shock. Camp counselors couldn't revive her, so they called an ambulance. That is a true story.

Unless you or a loved one has food allergies, it's impossible to convey how consuming avoidance can be. It is a little more in depth than "don't eat the peanuts". Severe allergic reactions can occur merely by smelling or touching the forbidden food.

Now that it's back to school time, what can you do so that you child isn't the one who gets sick?





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The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology issued a statement on Anaphylaxis in Schools and Other Childcare Settings. The statement outlines requirements that school staff, childcare providers, and food service personnel must take. But please don't rely solely on staff adherence to these requirements. Take matters into your own hands.

Here are some proactive steps you can take to preclude allergic reactions in your child:

1. Inform the staff specifically what is needed to ensure no problems at school. Let them know that you want to work with them to keep your child healthy and not cause classroom disruptions. Get familiar with the school building, lunch facilities and policies regarding snacks.
2. Don't make assumptions about the staff's knowledge. Give them information and resources. Help them understand how to administer medications or to use an epi-pen. Remind them that since they are required by federal law to assist your child and to include her in normal school activities, you'd like to help make that happen smoothly.
3. Empower your child. Reinforce the importance of knowing potential food allergy triggers and identifying them to her teacher. Med-Alert bracelets are helpful, too.

Sure it may take some adjusting on everyone's part, but by working with the school and with your child, you should be able to have a safe, happy and healthy school year!





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