

Nine steps to a smart start

by: [GreatSchools Staff](#)

With a little planning, you can make going back to school simple and stress-free.

As the lazy days of summer slip away, it will soon be time to put away the beach chairs and corner lemonade stands and prepare for going back to school. Here are some tips to make the transition easier.

Adjust to the new routine

Ease into the school-year schedule. Getting back into the school routine can be a challenge for everyone in the family. To make the adjustment easier, start early.

- A few weeks before school starts, move bedtime back to an earlier time.
- Put a positive spin on going back to school. Talk about the fun things your child will learn, the old friends he'll see and the new friends he'll make.
- If your child is anxious about starting the next grade, reassure her that other children have these feelings too.
- Don't make plans for big trips right before the start of school.
- Establish school-day schedules for homework, TV, baths and bedtime.
- Arrange play dates with friends from school to re-establish connections that may have been dropped for the summer, or to create new ones.

Get organized

Take advantage of the slower pace during your time away from school to set up for the busy school year ahead.

- Many schools send out school information and a packet of forms to fill out before school starts. If you can discipline yourself to fill out the paperwork several days before it's due, you'll avoid a last-minute panic.
- Have the necessary immunization records available for easy reference.
- Update school emergency contact and health information for the coming year.
- As you read through all the school information, mark important dates (such as back-to-school night, parent-teacher conferences and school holidays) on the family calendar.
- Start a folder for school newsletters and other papers so that you can easily find and refer to them if necessary.
- Establish a "get ready the night before" policy. Pick clothes for the next day and pack the backpack every evening before bedtime, and you'll save precious time in the morning.

Shopping: take advantage of sales

School clothes

It's always a great idea to buy what you know you'll need early, if you can. Go through your children's wardrobes and weed out everything they've outgrown. By reducing the clutter, you will be able to get them dressed quickly and easily.

Keep in mind school dress codes while shopping. Some schools prohibit short skirts and tank tops for girls and "sagging" (baggy trousers that hang low) for boys. Schools may also have rules regarding printed words or phrases on clothes.

Nutrition: plan healthy meals

Get creative with easy, healthy ideas for school-day meals. If you plan and gather what you need on the weekends, you'll make life a lot less stressful and meals more nutritious during the week.

Breakfast

Remember the most important meal of the day. Fruit smoothies make a quick and healthy addition to the usual fare.

Lunch

If you will be packing a lunch from home, be sure to have a sturdy lunch box or a supply of paper bags on hand. Here are some quick and creative ideas for making school lunches healthy and fun:

- For the younger child, use cookie cutters to make sandwiches into interesting shapes.
- Sneak vegetables like lettuce, cucumber or zucchini slices into sandwiches.
- Buy baked chips and low-fat crackers or pretzels. Avoid items with trans fats in them such as packaged cookies, snack cakes and regular chips.
- Choose 1% or fat-free milk or 100% fruit juices.
- Make fruit fun to eat by cutting it into slices and putting it on a skewer or include small containers of applesauce or pineapple packed in its own juice.
- For the younger child, write a surprise message or draw a funny picture and put it in her lunch.
- Get older children to help pack their lunches. You may need to arrange the morning routine (or evening routine if you do this the night before) so that you don't do this chore by yourself.

Dinner

Plan dinners for the week ahead and shop on the weekends to avoid last minute trips to the grocery store.

Set priorities and schedules

To make the best use of your time and keep life from being harried, think about priorities for family members and then schedule them into the week.

For children

- Before school begins, discuss what extracurricular activities your child will participate in. If your child needs a little extra encouragement to audition for jazz band or to take that early morning Italian class, now is the time to go over the benefits of these activities. If, however, your child needs to have limits set, have her pick her favorite activities and forgo the rest. Be realistic and don't fall victim to over-programming.
- Make sure to leave enough time to do homework and for family time.

For parents

Determine how much time you can give to the school each month as a volunteer and involved parent: in the classroom, on field trips, for fundraising events and on school-wide committees.

For the family

Start a family calendar in a common area where each family member can write down his or her activities.

Prepare for the homework ahead

Having set routines and a place to study at home will make it easier for your child to be organized and successful at school.

- Set up a well-lit, quiet place with a good work surface to do homework. Try to keep this place dedicated to homework and free of other clutter.
- Establish a regular homework time. This will help your student to complete assignments on time.
- Discourage distractions such as television, radio, the Internet or phone conversations during homework time.

Arrange for transportation

Everyone will feel better if transportation to and from school is addressed well before the start of the school year, particularly if your child is walking, riding his bike or taking the bus.

Walking or biking

- Chart out a route to school or to the school bus stop.
- If your child is going to a new school, take a dry run a few days before school starts.
- Go over the rules of stranger awareness and traffic safety. Warn your child to always walk with a friend, and to avoid vacant lots and places where there are not a lot of people.
- Be sure your child has your daytime phone number (including area code) and address, as well as the number of another familiar adult.
- Scout out safe houses in the neighborhood where your child can go in case of an emergency.

Taking the bus

- Remember to get the new bus schedule!
- If your child will be taking the bus for the first time, discuss the bus route and bus safety rules with her.

Driving

- If you will be driving your child, have a backup arrangement with another parent in case you are delayed for some reason.
- Confirm carpool arrangements in advance and make sure your child knows who will be picking him up before and after school.
- Become familiar with your school's traffic safety rules, drop-off and pick-up procedures.

Confirm after-school care arrangements

Most after-school care arrangements must be made months ahead, frequently in the winter or spring before your child starts school. As the school year approaches, however, it's a good idea to confirm your plans.

- Make sure your child knows where he is going after school.
- Double-check on your care plans and communicate with the provider a few days before school starts.
- If your child will be home alone after school, establish safety rules for locking doors and windows, and for answering the door and the telephone. Make sure she knows to check in with you or another adult when she arrives at home.