

# Back-to-School Checklist

Top tips for setting your kids up for success as your family prepares for a new school year.

## 1 Go Rah! Rah! for School!

As the end of summer approaches, don't let your kids go into a funk over having to go back to school. Instead, start talking about the fun, exciting activities and opportunities they will have in a new grade. These can include dances, field trips, playing sports, new teachers, seeing old friends, school clubs, and whatever else is going to make the new school year a great school year. It may take some time for your kids to get on board, but if you consistently and enthusiastically focus on the positives, they'll start to get excited, too.

## 2 Shop till You Drop

Everybody needs new clothes and school supplies, so why not make shopping for these items fun. Let your kids compile their own shopping lists (which you can review before heading to the store) and then hit the stores together, as a family. Depending on their ages, let your kids have a say in your purchases, especially when it comes to clothes, shoes and accessories. Balance their input with the limits and rules you've set so they're happy with what they get and you're satisfied they're staying within proper boundaries.

## 3 Put School Bedtime Issues to Rest

Kids often don't have a set bedtime during the summer months. So when the start of school draws near, you may find it difficult to re-establish a bedtime routine for your child. One way to meet this challenge is to set a bedtime and a wake-up time about a month before the first day of school. Then gradually (once a week) move these times back 15 minutes until you reach the bedtime and wake-up times you want your child to follow when school starts. And stay consistent with your bedtimes and wake-up times, even on the weekends. Boys Town Pediatrics recommends that elementary school students get 10 to 12 hours of sleep each night, and that tweens and teens get 9 to 11 hours. Making sure your child gets enough sleep is one of the best things you can do to ensure he or she will be attentive in class, have energy for the school day and maintain good physical health once school starts.

## 4 Celebrate the First-Day-of-School Eve

The night before school starts, have a little party to bid farewell to the summer and welcome a new school year. Let your kids pick their favorite foods for dinner, have a cake and get some balloons and streamers. After dinner, go through photos that were taken during the summer break and talk about the fun things your family did. Before the kids go to bed (at their new school-year bedtime), let them share what they're most excited about for the coming school year. Putting a positive twist on going back to school can help put your kids in a more upbeat mood and reinforce all the new opportunities a new school year holds.

## 5 Make Your Child a Morning Person

Get your child used to morning activities by planning your final summer activities for mornings and early afternoons. Putting more emphasis on being active in the morning will help your child become accustomed to what will happen during a school day. Create and maintain a consistent routine.

This will help children make a smoother adjustment to their new school schedule once school starts.

## **6 Let Learning Continue All Summer**

Keep your child's thinking skills sharp by displaying a love of learning in your home all year round, especially in the summer. Create a home environment that is rich in books, educational games and projects that challenge your child. Ask questions, exchange ideas and allow your child to arrive at his or her own conclusions. Above all, let your child see how much you enjoy learning challenges and activities. The summer months shouldn't be a time when your child turns off his or her brain and doesn't hit "restart" until the first day of school. Make learning a year-round habit!

## **7 Return to the Routine**

Believe it or not, your child wants a structured daily routine, especially during the school year. Having a routine lets kids know what is expected of them and puts everyone on the same page when it comes to things like study times and locations, curfews (on school nights and weekends), expectations for behavior at home and at school, mealtimes, rules for using phones and computers and watching television, schedules for extracurriculars (band, sports, chorus, etc.) and the dozens of other activities that will fill up your family's schedule during the school year. So sit down with your kids and come up with schedule of events for each day of the week and the weekends. Having them contribute will give them some ownership and make it more likely that they'll stick to the routine you develop. Obviously, bedtimes and wake-up times will be included (see #3) so your kids consistently get enough sleep and are ready for school on time every morning. Then create weekly calendars you can post on the fridge or in another handy spot so everyone knows what's going on.

## **8 Help Your Child Be a Goal-Setter Go-Getter**

Every student's goals for the new school year should include getting good grades, studying hard, completing homework correctly and on time, and using good behavior. But you can help make the school year more exciting and more interesting by encouraging your child to come up with some goals that are just for him or her. Winning a role in a school play, making a sports team, winning the spelling bee, working for the school newspaper, and running for a class office are just a few of the possibilities. Setting individual school goals allows children to "stretch" themselves, have new and different experiences, and perhaps find something for which they have a real passion.

## **9 Brush Up on School Behaviors**

The carefree, laid-back days of summer vacation can sometimes lead kids to have a memory lapse when it comes to school behaviors. Even the summer rules for behavior you expect your kids to follow might not provide enough reinforcement for how they'll be expected to behave once they're back in a classroom. That's why it's a good idea throughout the summer, and especially in the last few weeks before school starts, to do some "reminder" teaching on school behaviors. Go over behaviors like following instructions, getting the teacher's attention appropriately, waiting for a turn, getting along with others, working quietly during study time, and others with your child so he or she can be ready to use them when the school bell rings. Being proactive can head off problems and make your child's return to school smoother and more productive.

## **10 Set the Stage for a Healthy School Year**

Ensure your child is in good physical and mental health by scheduling doctor, dental, hearing, and eye appointments well before school starts. If you have concerns about your child's emotional or psychological development, discuss them with your pediatrician. He or she can let you know if your concerns are normal and appropriate for your child's age, or if they need to be looked at more closely. Also make sure your child's immunizations are up-to-date and that you have all the paperwork the school may need to confirm health-related requirements. Remember that when your student is healthy, he or she is better able to concentrate on schoolwork and be successful in the classroom.

## **11 Touch Base with Teachers**

At the start of the school year, contact your child's teachers, get acquainted with them, and let them know you want to be actively involved in helping your student to learn and grow. Make a plan with teachers for how you can keep track of your child's homework, activities, and progress throughout the school year. If your child is in the elementary grades, plan to volunteer in his or her classroom whenever possible. This helps your child understand that school is important to your family and that you care about learning. This also is a good way to see your child's daily classroom environment and routine. Most teachers welcome occasional parent help.

## **12 Think Positive, Be Positive!**

Let your kids know that it's okay to be a little nervous or anxious about the new school year. But reassure them that things will be just fine once they get familiar with their teachers, classmates, and the classroom routine. If you are anxious and worried about school, your child will pick up on that. So model confidence, excitement, and optimism as the school year approaches. Then continue to show your child how much you care by talking about any problems or concerns that arise during the first few days of classes. The start of school can be difficult for some kids, so try not to overreact and be ready to share positive strategies your child can use to cope.