

## EASIER BACK-TO-SCHOOL: A PARENT'S GUIDE



Check out these helpful tips to get your tween ready for school.

by Alexandra Mayzler

Before you set off on a solo trip to school supply store or organize your child's room and materials to prepare for her return to school, think about what "going back to school" really means and what lessons you could be teaching your child.

After a relaxed summer or little structure and almost no homework, September brings around the need for structure, organization and routine for your child. The weeks before school begins are a great time to plant these seeds for his upcoming routine. He will need to start thinking about school again, about catching up on procrastinated summer homework, how to think ahead by selecting the right materials for the new year, and how to organize himself by creating a system of binders, folders, and notebooks that works for him. All of this preparation will ensure your child that he is ready to start fresh and that he will not be overwhelmed by a sudden change of schedule. Before he even steps foot into the classroom he will have the opportunity to learn many important strategies, such as balancing homework time, down time and time to be with his friends.

Your role should be to help support your child in this learning process and encourage her to take ownership of her work/be proud of his work. Be a good role model: Students, even teens who hate to admit it, emulate parents in many ways and behaviors. If your child sees your work ethic as well as your ability to balance work and home, he will be more likely to implement the same strategies into his own routine.

Before school starts do these 5 simple things to help your child transition back to school smoothly:

**Model a Schedule:** If your child sees that you have organized your time well, then chances are he'll think twice about leaving things to the last-minute. He will become used to a steady schedule without much running around in the moments before the family leaves the house. As a result, when your child starts planning out his time, he will strive to get places on time and plan ahead to complete work. Help your child to create a realistic and structured schedule by keeping your own and the family schedule as consistent as possible. Don't simply plan your child's days out for him, but make suggestions and encourage him to participate in creating his schedule. If he feels included in the process he will most likely be agreeable, and follow through without much argument.

**Keep a "Community Board:"** Have a space - either virtual through an online calendar that everyone can access or a simple wall calendar in the kitchen - a place where everyone can write in information about upcoming events. By having a shared space for the family, both parents and children will be aware of important events such as play rehearsals, and sports practice. This is another important way that your child can feel included in the planning process and that he is not being constantly told what to do.

**Happy School Supplies Shopping:** Many trips to the store end in arguments or forgotten items. Help your child understand the value of pre-planning so that he learns to think and prepare for actions before taking them on. Ask him to create a list of materials that he will need by thinking about his classes and using any pre-made list that her teachers have provided. Encourage him to see if he has any materials left over from last year: not only does this save money, but it saves time at the store and it will help your child rid his desk of papers and notebooks he may not need anymore.

**Set Reasonable Expectations:** Many students are eager to go back-to-school to improve on last year's performance. Oftentimes, students simply want to erase a bad year by starting off fresh but don't consider the steps necessary for improvement. To help your child think realistically about personal goals for the year and how to accomplish these goals take a bit of time out of your day and discuss expectations, both yours and your child's. Instead of focusing on the grades themselves, sit down with your child and make a list of strengths and weaknesses. From there, guide him in thinking about

specific actions that he will need to take to make the changes from last to this year, such as making outlines or setting a detailed homework schedule. Instead of focusing on the outcome, such as a test score or grade, help your child understand that the learning process is just as important and that success and failure are not determined by a letter or a percentage. Remind him that even the most successful people have room for improvement.

**Leave room for error:** Seeing your child make mistakes or do things in inefficient ways is sometimes difficult, however giving him room to correct his errors will allow him to learn how to fix problems. You might be tempted to just do it for him, but take a deep breath and encourage your child to arrive at the solution for himself. If he is struggling then suggest and encourage alternate routes and let him know that mistakes are part of the learning process and are not a sign of failure or incompetence.

At this stage in education, we are learning that there is not one right or wrong way to study for a test and that, while one method may be great for one of your children, but not so successful for the other. The important thing is that you take an interest and make yourself available to help your children succeed in school. If you are enthusiastic about the upcoming school year, your child will be too.

*Alexandra Mayzler is the Founder and Director of Thinking Caps Tutoring, a comprehensive tutoring company dedicated to developing innovative and individualized approaches to teaching. She participates in the coordination the New York Dyslexia Association's annual conference, is a curriculum consultant for independent and public schools, and the author of study skills book to be published in September 2010. Alexandra spends her free time thinking about how to make studying easier, more interesting, and potentially even enjoyable!*



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