

Teen ..Education...From Beach Chairs to Classroom Desks.

From Beach Chairs to Classroom Desks: Help your daughter transition back to school.

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Do you remember going back to school after a lazy summer filled with unscheduled days and spontaneous trips to the beach? While free can be very relaxing, there comes a time in late summer when families need to abandon empty calendars and sleeping late and prepare for the new school year. Some teens look forward to returning to school, seeing old friends, and conquering new challenges, while others meet September with shaky knees and anxiety about all of the unknowns a new school year brings, such as new teachers, new friends and new bullies. Teen girls, especially, face the pressure to succeed academically and socially. By understanding your child's attitude and creating a steady routine and home environment, it will make the transition into the new school year a lot less stressful.



Although it may seem like your teenager wants to do everything with friends and may be slamming her bedroom door more often than she is keeping it open, remember that she still needs your guidance and support. Allowing her to test her independence doesn't mean that she will not appreciate the safety net of your recommendations, even though it is likely that she will deny she still needs her mom. While it might seem easier to do the back to school shopping and scheduling on your own, as your teen grows up, it is important that she have a role in the decision making process, discuss your suggestions with her, making recommendations, and allow her the opportunity to come up with some of the solutions "on her own."

- **Provide a structured family routine.** Begin the school year by creating a structured family routine so that your teen can learn to wisely plan her time, and know that even though each day brings its own challenges, her family will always be there. For example, set ground rules regarding dinner, regular homework time, and consistent bed time. A regular schedule that your daughter can easily adapt to will allow her to feel in control of her days, instead of feeling that she has been left out of the loop or that her feelings were not considered. Use wall calendars to plan out and inform the family of upcoming events and appointments. By showing your daughter how you plan out your time, you will be creating a model of how she can manage her time. The more organized you are, the more organized she will become.
- **Establish "check-in" days.** Within the established schedule set aside "check-in" days and ask that your daughter come to you with updates on school and extracurricular activities. For example, every Thursday plan to sit down for a snack and just chat about what's going on at school. Rather than just "nagging" her with questions at every meal, setting aside a safe time and asking her to come to you will encourage her to communicate with you and also advocate for herself. Allow her to discuss her homework, classes, upcoming tests, friends, and activities. If she has mentioned a particularly difficult class or assignment then make sure to follow-up. It is also important that these "check ins" are judgment-free: if your daughter feels that you are being critical, the less likely she will be to come to you when she is struggling. This can also help avoid the "Mom, you just don't get it!"
- **Talk with your daughter about her teachers FIRST.** If you wish to also communicate with your daughter's teachers to make sure that she is on track then first speak with your daughter about your plans. Though your daughter does not have to give you permission to speak with her teachers, it is helpful for her to feel like you are not simply going "behind her back." She will be more likely to open the lines of communication if she knows that she is part of the dialogue.
- **Understand the challenges your daughter faces.** As the school year progresses, be aware of what challenges your daughter may be facing. Does she seem to be struggling with a science class? Is she having trouble with a particular teacher? Is she constantly arguing with a group of friends? If your daughter's behavior has changed or you start to see dips in her confidence and performance, make sure to acknowledge and work towards a solution that the whole family has a part in. Let her know that you aren't only interested in hearing about the good but that you're also available to help her or find others who can provide support. For example, if she is having trouble with academics, point out that she can get help by working with a teacher, tutor, or friend or if she is struggling with social problems then she can chat with the school psychologist or counselor. Let her know that feeling overwhelmed is normal for everyone and that she doesn't have to handle stress alone.
- **Set realistic boundaries and expectations.** While realizing that your teen will push the envelope as she tests her independence, it is nevertheless important to set boundaries and expectations. A few family rules will help your teenager explore her freedom while learning to grow within guidelines. It is important to have the family agree on a set of expectations that the entire family abides by and communicate these expectations to your teen; for example, everyone is expected to sit down to dinner at the table and turn cell phones off. It is important that these expectations are consistently reinforced so that your teen can develop a steady routine, despite the chaos of middle school or high school. These guidelines could include academic goals, behavioral expectations, and social boundaries. Consistency in your rules will ensure that your teen knows what is expected and what consequences there are if the expectations are not met. She will appreciate knowing what you expect of her and be able to establish her own expectations of herself and the world around her, even if she won't admit it.

The start of a new school year is stressful for everyone, *especially teen girls*. There are new friends, new teachers, more homework and more responsibility. As adults we are confronted with such new challenges daily and often times we feel overwhelmed, so just imagine how your twelve or thirteen year old must feel. Teen girls today are constantly bombarded by the media and technology telling them who they should be and what they should be by to fit in, so it is essential that your daughters know that home and family will always be a safe place and that you accept them just as they are.