

GEAR UP FOR A GREAT SCHOOL YEAR



It's hard to see summer end. Whether it's the first day of elementary, middle, or even high school, going back to class after a long leisurely summer break can be difficult for children and parents.

New routines, earlier bedtimes, new teachers, and new academic challenges are enough to make any child want to hide under the covers 'til next summer! Here are some tips to help reduce your kids' stress.

Ten stress-reduction tips for back to school

Make some adjustments now and you'll have a calmer household and a more focused child when the school bell finally rings. Here are 10 tips to get you started:

1. **Get your child to bed earlier** – and up earlier – a few days before school starts to get used to the new routine.
2. **Try to meet the new teacher** or see the classroom before the first day.
3. **Discuss the upcoming school year expectations with your child** – especially any concerns your child may have.
4. **Shop for school supplies** – even if the teacher makes special requests, you know you'll need pencils, pens, notebooks, and so on.
5. **Lay out clothing, money, backpacks, car keys, etc.** the night before.
6. **Let your child have a say** in clothing, lunches, and other small decisions.
7. **Practice your transportation route** to avoid a mad dash to the car or bus stop.

8. **Prepare lunches the night before** and select items for a simple, nourishing breakfast so no one bolts off with an empty stomach.
9. **Keep a small stash of cash handy** for those days when your child asks for project or lunch money at the last minute.
10. **Make time each day to talk about your child's day** and help him or her get into a routine of homework and planning for activities.

Start the year off safe

First off, make sure your child has the necessary immunizations and physicals required for his or her age and grade. If your child plays a sport, you'll probably need a physical certificate as well. Check with the school and schedule any doctor's appointments before the end of summer. You'll beat the rush and save yourself a lot of time and hassle.

No matter how your child gets to school – by bus, car, bike, or foot – keep these basic transportation safety tips in mind.

Bus

- Don't stand too close to the curb or in the street.
- Wait for the bus to stop completely before going toward it.
- Make sure no other traffic is coming before crossing to the bus.

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Guidance when you need it most

- Don't stand or move around on the bus.
- Make sure the bus driver can see you at all times.

Car

- Insist that all passengers buckle up or ride in age-appropriate safety or booster seats.
- Make all children younger than 13 years of age ride in the back seat.
- Limit your teen driver's number of passengers and enforce "no eating, drinking, or talking on cell phones" rules while driving.

Bike

- Always wear a helmet.
- Ride on the same side of the road in the same direction as traffic.
- Use hand signals.
- Obey traffic lights and stop signs.
- Wear brightly colored clothing for extra visibility.
- Lock bikes securely while at school.

On foot

- Make sure your route is safe. Use intersections with a trained crossing guard whenever possible.
- Because younger children may not be as cautious as they should be, think carefully when deciding whether your child is ready to walk to school without an adult.
- Brightly colored clothing will make your child more visible to drivers.

Pack "the back" for comfort and safety

No safety tips would be complete without a mention of those increasingly heavy backpacks most every child totes. To help ease the strain on your child's back, look for a backpack with wide, padded shoulder straps and a padded back.

You could also consider a rolling backpack – unless your child has stairs to navigate or will trudge through a lot of snow. Make sure to pack light and use all the compartments to evenly distribute the weight. Backpacks should not weigh more than 10 to 20 percent of your child's body weight.

Bottom line:

With a little advance planning and some common-sense safety rules, you and your child can ease into a safe, productive school year.

Additional resources:

"Back to School Time" – www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content3/back.school.p.k12.4.html

American Academy of Pediatrics: "Back to School Tips" – www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/augschool.cfm

"Eleven Must Do's in Preventing Back to School Stress" – www.familyresource.com/parenting/school-and-learning/eleven-must-dos-in-preventing-back-to-school-stress

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