8 Steps for Getting Kids Ready for School

Whether you’re reading this before your children start school or after they have started, it doesn’t matter. Follow these steps to help set them up for success in their new school year.

**Shut Down Summertime Leniencies.** As school approaches or starts, set up a family meeting (whether you have a significant other or not) to discuss the rules that will change at home: bedtimes, shutting TVs off, removing entertainment electronics from bedrooms, having to turn in social media devices and “friend sleep over rules.” Allow your child to voice his or her concerns over these changes, adopt the policies, and implement them on a specified date. It’s also a good idea to document the changes and post them where all can see them; sometimes children become forgetful of what they agreed to.

**School Supply Shopping.** Sit down with your children and allow them to help you determine what supplies they are going to need for the coming school year. You are the parent and have final say over what is on the list, but use that authority with kindness and respect. Take your children shopping and let them be in charge as they carry the hand baskets and retrieve all the items on the list. Give them a set amount of money to spend to accommodate all that’s on the list. You’re the guide and the coach, so remain calm if unauthorized items make their way into the basket. Allow your children to pay for the items at the checkout and carry the bags to the car.

**The Work Space at Home.** Collaborate with your children as to where homework will be done. You can take turns coming up with the ideas and when they suggest unreasonable locations (such as in front of the TV), allow them to be placed on the list at first. Go back through to review the list and eliminate any locations that you’re not OK with. Remember, collaborating with your children is a way of helping them feel respected, but you’re still the boss. Set up the space that was decided on and help your children organize the supplies that were purchased at the store.

**The Homework Schedule.** Each child is different when it comes to doing homework, so this next exercise will require your greatest level of patience. Help each of your children determine when they feel that they are best able to work on homework. Some children can do it as soon as they get home and others need a break before starting it. Coach each child into establishing their own schedule, make it clear and defined, and then document it. Your job will be to help reinforce what is decided.

**Control of Entertainment and Distractions.** If you’ve never previously done what I’m about to suggest, announcing it to your children could be a challenge, so remain calm and be patient (are you seeing a pattern here?). I strongly encourage you to announce a rule that any and all entertainment electronics and hand-held social media devices are to remain off or be turned in to the parents, during the established homework times. This new rule should be in effect on school days, Monday thru Thursday and even on days when there is no homework. If you don’t implement this rule, what child would ever choose to work on a difficult homework assignment when they are free to check their Facebook pages or cell phone texts whenever they want? I’ve heard too many stories from parents who did not
implement this rule and had their children come home after school reporting they had no homework, only to suddenly and mysteriously remember a homework assignment later that night at bedtime.

**The Bedtime Schedule.** I’ll tell you now that it is NOT your responsibility to get your children to fall asleep. That must happen naturally and your children are more in charge of that than you are. Your job is to create an environment and an atmosphere that is conducive to your children getting sleepy and eventually falling asleep. Your direct role is to define when bedtime will occur, enforcing it, and removing all distractions from their bedrooms, such as video games, televisions, cell phones, and computer.

**Your Children’s Dietary Needs.** What child would turn down candy bars over broccoli? Not many. This is where you come in as a parent. You are directly responsible for ensuring that your children have healthy foods to eat and the foods that are least healthy are controlled and minimized. This means making sure that your children have healthy dinners at night and nutritious foods available to them for breakfast in the morning. I’ve seen too many families where the family dinner experience is gone and everyone fend for themselves. The result is that children end up eating whatever they want and picking from some unhealthy selections.

**Being Available.** I’ve heard all the complaints from parents: I’m a single parent and I have to work long hours, my husband and I work in another city and neither of us get home before 7 p.m., our children have multiple after school activities and it’s hard to be home and enforce a set schedule for dinner, etc. Keep in mind that you’ve chosen your situation and regardless of what your family does, you are still responsible for your children and supervising or looking after them to be sure they follow through on what you have all decide. Do the best you can to be a parent who is available to ensure that rules are enforced and more importantly, that you are available to provide help with homework and assistance whenever necessary. They can’t do it on their own and need you to coach and guide them.