

## **The Back to School Challenge – Are Your Kids Ready?**

If visions of getting the kids to the bus stop on time bring you to your knees, then perhaps it's time to rethink the back to school Olympics. Late summer nights, long beach days, and all those unplanned neighborhood play dates suddenly come to a screeching halt right around the time backpacks and pencils hit the store shelves. Kids groan at the mention of summer reading lists and early bed times, but don't despair, prepare them for the school bell with these tricks and tactics taken from real New Hampshire moms who have calmed children and built excitement before the bus schedule ever hits the local newspaper.

### **Check out the class list**

Some area schools offer "step up days," introducing future classes to teachers in advance of the next year. This is a great chance to connect with friendly faces and learn about the curriculum. In many situations, there is no time to offer this service, so parents are left with the next best thing – obtaining the much anticipated class list. In my town we start running to the mailbox in July, and if we walk away empty handed, we drive to the school in anticipation of the master list. Within minutes the phones are ringing and a complete class roster has been compiled. The goal is to establish summer play dates solidifying a comfort level for the upcoming year.

### **Schedule free time**

Summer is all about having fun and spending time with friends and family, yet many kids are busy with camps and scheduled activities. If you work full time, consider taking a personal day and hit the beach or go on a hike with the family before the weather turns cooler. Taking the time with the kids now will ensure bonding time before schedules become too hectic with sports and after school activities.

### **Adjust schedules**

The key to ensuring kids are not falling asleep at their desks on the first day of school is getting plenty of sleep. Ideally, elementary age children should have between 10 to 12 hours of nightly rest, while those in middle and high school should be getting eight to nine hours. In order to accommodate for early wake up times, try adjusting bed time routines approximately two weeks prior to the start of school. Another useful tip is to get the neighborhood parents onboard with the earlier routine. Encouraging parent friends will ensure your child is not the only one staring out the window while the rest of the neighborhood is still running through sprinklers.

Establishing earlier sleeping patterns should be gradual moving bedtimes back by just 10 minutes to start. A couple of days later adjust the lights out rule by 15 minutes. Continuously modify the routine until you have reached the desired bedtime schedule in time for the first day of school. Once the sleeping arrangements are worked out, it's time to practice eating habits. Try serving breakfast as soon as the kids are out of bed in order to avoid morning time fiascos. Sidestep turning on the television until everyone is dressed and fed while sticking with simple meals such as cereal, oatmeal, and toast to keep the momentum of the morning moving forward. Save the leisurely pancake breakfast for the weekend.

Lunches should also be scheduled at an earlier time as many schools start the afternoon routine as early as 10:30 a.m. Another great tip - some mom's even have the kids brush their teeth and get dressed prior to hitting the breakfast table.

### **Get the kids excited!**

Think back to when you were a kid preparing for the first day of school. Perhaps you were into the parachute pant craze, trapper keeper's, or jelly shoes. Listen to requests and if possible try and match these goals, as the right school supplies and clothing selection can get everyone excited. Go shopping with the kids and remember it is not necessary to spend a lot of money, as many chain stores offer similar looks to name brands, and coupons can make for great savings too. The goal is not to buy out the store, but to have an item kids can look forward to using for school. Another option to consider is splitting costs for clothes, shoes, and extra school items, summer jobs are perfect for chipping in on wardrobes. And most importantly, stick to your shopping list and only seek out sale items, since prices are always reduced.

### **Review school work**

Teachers will often supply summer reading lists in order to prepare students for the upcoming year. August is a great time to check out the suggestions at the public library or download books to a portable device. As you are adjusting bedtime routines, encourage the kids to curl up with the recommendations. They don't need to know it is a school book! Math skills can be tackled on road trips by counting trucks, out of state license plates, and measuring miles travelled. If your child has concerns about learning, be sure to e-mail the teacher a note so they are prepared in advance of any special requirements that can help students have a better start.

### **Visit the school**

Kids can be nervous about a new classroom or starting a new school. Ease these worries by contacting the staff and request a visit about a week before classes start. Arranging advanced time with the teacher and seeing the classroom can leave students with a positive feeling and confidence knowing exactly what they will be walking into. Take the time to show your kids around the hallways, point out where the bathroom is located, and visit the playground for some time to relax.

In all likelihood, by summer's end, the kids will be itching to see their friends and getting back to a routine even if it does include homework and getting up before the sun rises. If worries do arise, be sure to reach out to the school staff whose goal is to see your child succeed and be comfortable in their school environment.