

Handling the Back-to-School Rush

Late summer and early fall can be a challenging time for busy families as children and adults alike readjust to the school calendar. Shifting gears will be easier if you plan ahead for schedule changes and possible emergencies.

Before school starts

Going back to school after summer vacation is a big adjustment for most kids. You can help your child by taking a few steps that will ease the adjustment to the new routine.

Try to return from vacation at least two or three days before school starts. Children and teenagers need to make both physical and mental adjustments when they go back to school. A few days of "breathing room" after vacation or summer camp lets them ease into the changes that they'll be facing.

Help your children start getting to bed earlier the week before school begins. Many children and teenagers get so used to staying up late that they have problems getting up in the morning when school starts. Getting to bed earlier and waking up earlier in the mornings will help them readjust their body clocks.

Start limiting TV and screen time and brush up on reading and math skills. For many children, the structure required for homework is a big adjustment. It may be easier for them if you start limiting TV and screen time, and setting aside daily time for reading or math activities. Make reading and math fun with games and activities from websites such as [Funbrain.com](https://www.funbrain.com) or [Scholastic.com](https://www.scholastic.com).

Do something fun to mark the transition back to school. If you have vacation time left, consider taking a day off from work to spend with your family.

Visit or revisit a new school. If your child or teenager will be starting a new school, try to visit it before the first day of classes. Familiarize your child with the location of classrooms, the cafeteria, bathrooms, media center, and gym. If your child is new to the school, ask about connecting with a veteran family before school starts.

Check the websites for your children's schools. These sites may have announcements about last-minute changes and important reminders about bus schedules, supply lists, lunch menus, and upcoming events.

If possible, consider working a shorter day on the first day of school to ease the transition. This will allow you to see your child off to school in the morning and to be there after school to talk about the first day's events.

Call your child care provider at least a week before school starts to review your arrangement. Plan for the times when you know you'll need backup care. Get the school calendar and check the dates for vacations, Monday holidays, and early-release days. Ask about your provider's availability on these days.

Know the school bus route and schedule. Some younger children find it reassuring to walk to the school bus stop a few times and to see the bus route and drop-off spot at school. For a

younger child, attach a card to the child's backpack with the bus number on it so he knows which bus to take. Write your cellphone number on the reverse side so that you can be contacted if he takes the wrong bus home. Also, clearly note the stop where he gets off so that he can show it to the bus driver if he is confused. Drive him along the route so he can anticipate landmarks.

Talk with children about bus safety. For example, stay in your seat while the bus is moving and wait until it stops before heading for the door.

Do something fun to mark the transition back to school. If you have vacation time left, consider taking a day off from work to spend with your family. If not, have a special family meal together. Look at last year's school photos to see how much everyone has grown.

Make a list of things you need to do before school starts. Your children may want to make their own "To Do" list.

Go over new arrangements and routines with your family well before school starts. Talk about carpool or transportation plans, before- and after-school arrangements, and any new child care providers.

Label everything that your child will be taking to school. Put labels on coats, backpacks, lunch boxes, and water bottles.

Prepare preschoolers for the coming changes. You may need to explain that their older brothers or sisters won't be home all day now that school is starting, but that your family will still be able to do many things together after school and on weekends.

Getting organized at home

Put up a family calendar in a central place. Jot down key items, using different colored markers or pens for each person. Talk about upcoming events each week with family members. Consider an online calendar that adults and teens can access from any computer.

Give each family member a place to store things for school and work. This could be a spot on a hall table or a plastic bin near the door. Write checks for lunch money and pack parts of lunches in advance to avoid the morning rush.

Review household chores with everyone in your family. You may want to post everyone's jobs on the fridge or on a home computer.

Designate a quiet spot for each child to do their homework. Be sure the study space is clutter-free and organized with needed school supplies for the coming year.

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Create a filing system for important school papers and activities. Buy a special folder with sections, or set up some other filing system to help organize school papers, forms you'll need to fill out, and family members' activities. Use a different slot or folder for each class or activity—your child's music lessons, kids' sports forms, important handouts from the teacher.

Pick out clothes the night before. You and your children will have less hectic mornings if you pick out clothes the night before. To make getting dressed easier for younger children, you might

put a hook on the back of their closet doors and encourage them to hang the next day's clothes there.

Planning up for sick days and emergencies

Work out before- and after-school care and backup care. Talk with friends, relatives, and other parents who may be willing to offer, share, or trade care. Find out if you can count on them for occasional backup care. Friends and family may be your only option if your child is mildly ill. Offer to help them in return when you're off work.

Know your options at work. Go over your company's policies regarding time off, sick day, and family leave so you'll know how much flexibility you have in an emergency. Ask questions if anything is unclear.

Make sure that your children will always have your work and cellphone numbers with them at school and activities.

Find out if your regular child care provider or sitter can suggest or help you find substitute care. If she knows someone who might be able to help, schedule a time to meet and talk with the person before an emergency arises.

See if any family child care providers or child care centers in your area offer backup or drop-in care. Some centers provide care for extra children as an extension of their regular services. A Jewish Community Center or Y in your area might have a drop-in program. Ask your child's school if any child care is available on site before or after school, or if any child care centers drop off or pick up students before and after school.

Work out any carpool or transportation arrangements. Make these arrangements as early as possible to avoid last-minute surprises.

Make sure that your children will always have your work and cellphone numbers with them at school and activities. Have your child keep the numbers in a wallet, backpack, or locker. If you're often away from a phone, tell children how to reach you in an emergency or give them the name of an available friend or relative.

Use text messages if your children prefer to communicate this way. When you need a quick answer, children may respond more promptly to a text than to a phone call. Students should be mindful of their school's phone and Internet policies, particularly for contacting families during school time.

Finally, talk with your children about what they look forward to and what concerns they may have about the new school year. Are they worried that they won't like their teachers or will find it hard to make friends? Is your child sad to be starting school without a friend who moved away or will be going to a different school? Offer as much reassurance as you can, and let your child know that you will always be there to provide support. If you feel your child's emotional concerns are more significant or long-standing, it would be helpful to set up an appointment with the teacher, school psychologist, or school counselor to plan supports for the coming year.



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