

Golden Rules Take the Stress Out of “Back to School”

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For most people, back-to-school season is a time for a fresh start, including new clothes and school supplies. But the beginning of a new school year also brings shopping stress as you make your way through the aisles of every store searching for school supplies and ideas to make this year better for both you and your child.

Following are some tips to not only reduce your stress but also help build confidence in your children on their first day back and throughout the year.

1 Plan ahead.

Unless this is your first child going to school, you should have an idea about what they are going to need. Plan major shopping trips for clothes, shoes and standard “back-to-school” supplies well in advance.

2 Be prepared.

Think about what might be needed to replenish supplies during the school year (pencils, pens, crayons, glue sticks, glue bottles, notebook paper) and store them in an available drawer, cabinet or plastic storage container. Don't buy so much that there is no place to store your items, but make purchases that will allow you to save money and time by buying supplies when they are greatly discounted to eliminate future trips to the store.

3 Inspire imagination.

Allow your children access to (age-appropriate) basic school supplies at all times. These are things like construction paper, crayons, markers, glue and scissors. This is a good way to allow children to use their imagination, be self-sufficient and learn at the same time.

4 Build Self-esteem.

For younger children, have a place at home (refrigerator, window, door, bulletin board, etc.) to display artwork. Children get a great deal of self-esteem from seeing their “hard work” being appreciated.

5 Make a launch pad.

Have a place to store book bags, lunch boxes and jackets. Make children accountable for placing these items where they belong when they come home. This will become a habit for them and much less stress for you. They will also know exactly where they are in the morning!

6 Teach independence.

If your child is responsible for bringing his/her daily snack to school, then this will help the family. Find an appropriate-sized container, preferably clear plastic that can be in a handy place in the pantry or kitchen cabinet. Fill the container with healthy snacks. Your child can then choose their own snack daily.

7 Foster responsibility & commitment.

Chore lists can be a great way to create habits and allow children to make a contribution to the family responsibilities. Make a list of the chores that they can perform inside and outside the home based upon their age/abilities. Assure that they each know how to do the job and assist them if you need to the first few times they do the chore. You can also assign rewards for these chores. (Ex: going to movies, having a friend over, etc.).

8 Promote Reading.

Keep books visible to your child. It is important as a parent to enforce the importance of reading. If you like to check out books from the public library, have a place where they are kept and can be returned when they are read. Small boxes or decorative baskets can help assure books get read and returned on time.

9 Eat healthier.

Lunch boxes can help your child eat a healthy lunch. When using them, be sure to have provisions for keeping lunch cool, like small plastic ice packs. They keep yogurt, cheese, fruit or sandwiches with lunch meat/mayo safe during the school day, especially for those students who don't eat until late in the day. Make your child responsible for putting ice packs in the freezer and lunch boxes in an appropriate place when they come home.

10 Make mornings calmer.

Getting dressed in the morning can be a dreaded task for you and your child. Here is an exercise that can really save time and reduce stress, especially with younger children. Give each child five pieces of cardstock, index cards or the like. Allow them to decorate each of these with the name of each day of the week. Use a hole punch and make a hole to fit over a hanger. Each weekend (Sunday evening for example), have your child (assist as needed) lay out their clothes for the week, a day at a time. Put those clothes on a hanger if they are not already and label them with their newly created sign. You can use clothespins to attach socks or other accessories. An alternative method for folded clothes is to use a vertical pocket hanger, like those used for shoes, and label each with a day of the week.

11 Reduce clutter.

One area constantly battled in homes is the clutter of children's papers, artwork and other information we are deluged with daily from school. Create a file, preferably “vertical” for each child, in a filing cabinet or box that can be stored in a handy place. During the school year, file school papers in this file. If you are someone who has trouble “parting” with your child's works of art on a daily basis, file them with little thought and make time either quarterly or as a minimum at the end of the school year to purge and keep a sampling for the year. **Helpful hint:** keep a separate folder in this file for “important” school documents like report cards, letters, etc.

12 Learn from your child.

Each day ask your child to “teach” you something they have learned. You will be amazed at how differently they learn when they know they will be “teaching”. For young children, make homework fun by interacting with them. Children really enjoy sharing their new knowledge. When practice/repetition is involved, quality is more important than quantity so short periods of time may work better where there can be more concentration.

Today, our lives are filled with so much physical “stuff” and activities competing for our time. These steps can not only help you cope as a parent with the stress of the day but can also teach your children to be responsible and confident in their actions each day, all while having fun. 🧰