



BACK TO SCHOOL

Ready for a
new year?

- FASHION
- STUDYING
- HEALTH
- ACTIVITIES

A Checklist for Parents

GIVE YOUR CHILD A HEAD START THIS SCHOOL YEAR

The back-to-school experience is a big deal for students, but it can be an even bigger deal for the parents who have to do all the work and run the errands involved with the new school year.

Your job as a parent is an important one, though, if you want your child to start the year off right. Here are some tips for making the back-to-school season a success for parents and children alike.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR: When the school sends you information, look at your calendar right away. You'll want to mark down any meet-the-teacher nights, parent meetings, major athletic events or any other activities you'll want to be involved in. The earlier you plan for it, the more involved you can be in your child's education.

SET NEW ROUTINES: Make a conscious effort to get your children prepared for their new schedule well before the school year begins. Several days or weeks before school



Parents can be a great influence on children when they get involved in their education.

starts, set the alarm clock earlier for your kids and give them an earlier bedtime. It's best to ease them into the new schedule rather than going cold-turkey on the first day of school.

MAKE A HOMEWORK SPOT: It's a good idea to pick a quiet place in your home

that can be used to do homework, then clear it off ahead of time. Your children need to know that you're making their studies a priority, and setting aside a desk or table as a work space is a great way to keep a peaceful home.

KNOW THE TEACHERS: Whether or not there's an

official meet-the-teacher night for your child's school, you should plan to get to know the teachers that will be involved in your kids' lives. Write them notes. Meet them briefly in person if possible. Make sure they're comfortable communicating with you about your children, and take their advice

to heart.

SHARE ENTHUSIASM: Show your kids that you care about their academics by finding out about what they're learning. Review their books and study materials, and use your own experiences to help in the teaching process. Children are much more likely to be enthusiastic about school if parents show they truly care about what's happening at class.

VOLUNTEER: After you've met the teachers, you should have a better idea of what their needs are. If you can volunteer regularly or, say, take a position on the local PTA board, that's great. If not, even the occasional volunteer job will help keep you tuned in with the school and provide some help for the teacher.



STUDY TIP:

GET ORGANIZED, STAY ORGANIZED

The start of a school year is the perfect time to set up a system that keeps your notes, papers and books organized. If you create a way of staying organized that works well for you personally — using color-coded folders, or dedicating a bookshelf at home to each class you're taking, perhaps — it will be much easier to stay on track as the school year progresses. Find a method that works best for you, then stick with it all year long.

The First-Day Outfit

NERVOUS ABOUT WHAT TO WEAR? YOU'RE NOT ALONE



Surely the oldest back-to-school ritual of all is shopping for new clothes, then agonizing over the perfect outfit to wear on the first day of school.

After all, it's only human nature to want to leave a good first impression, and going back to school is a great opportunity for students to show off their personal style.

Shopping for school clothes doesn't have to be stressful, though. If you start early and know what you're shopping for, it will be easy to look your best when school starts.

KNOW THE DRESS CODE

Before you spend a dime on a new wardrobe, you should know exactly what your school allows and what it doesn't. Make sure you have a copy of the current official dress code before you hit the stores, and don't assume it will be the same as last year. Schools sometimes change the rules over the summer, and different grades or campuses often have different restrictions on what students can wear.

Once you know the dress code, be sure to follow it carefully. If something you want to buy is questionable, then err on the conservative side to make sure your purchases stay

within the rules. No matter how cute or handsome the clothes make a student look, it's embarrassing to be called out for breaking the dress code.

BRAND-NAME STYLE

At some point, every student and parent will face an age-old question: whether to buy brand-name clothes.

When children reach a certain age — typically in middle school or early in high school — their friends will start to prefer a brand of clothing that's "in," and it's rarely an inexpensive brand. That means families have to make the decision between increasing their clothing expenditures or making their child feel deprived.

It's a good idea to strike a balance in the middle, though. Most families can afford at least one or two items of clothing from a popular brand, but it's not wise to go overboard and switch out entire wardrobes based on the fickle winds of teenage fashion.



STUDY TIP:

MAKE STUDYING PART OF YOUR ROUTINE

Just like people get in great physical shape by making exercise a regular part of their daily routine, students can also work out their mental muscles by making studying a predictable part of the day. Set a time that works best for you — maybe early in the morning, right after class, or before you go to bed — and plan to do your studying at that time every day, no matter what. You can even use an alarm clock, computer timer or smart phone to remind you that it's study time.

Beyond the Classroom

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES TAKE FOCUS, DEDICATION

For most students, extracurricular activities such as sports, dance or music make up an important part of their school experience.

When done properly, they accentuate the academic side of school and lead to a more well-rounded adulthood. When done wrong, though, they can distract from school and add unnecessary pressure to children's lives.

FIND BALANCE

Students today have more choices for extracurricular activities than ever before. Not only are there usually lots of in-school options between sports, art and music classes, but there are also plenty of private businesses and clubs that offer more ways for children to spend time honing their skills.

The important thing is for students to not stretch themselves too thin. If they find one or two activities that they either thoroughly enjoy or excel at, that's much better than signing up for every single activity available, all year long.

FOCUS, FOCUS

When students do find an activity that interests them, they should pour themselves into it.

Many people develop lifelong hobbies or careers out of what started out as an extracurricular activity after school.

If they lose interest, that's OK, too. Parents should strike the right balance between letting their children move on to other areas they'd like to develop while, at the same time, helping them stay dedicated even when they're discouraged.

HAVE FUN

Finally, remember that the ultimate goal of extracurricular activities is to have fun.

Some parents and students have a tendency to take things far too seriously. Sports are an oft-cited example of how people can let their emotions boil over and get too focused on one thing that, after all, is nothing but a game.

Whether the activity is done just for grins or if it has the potential to grow into something at the college or professional level, it's important to keep things in perspective. School years are a time to be enjoyed, and extracurricular activities can be a big part of the fun.



STUDY TIP:

SET UP REWARDS FOR YOURSELF

Not everybody enjoys studying, and for many people it's a task to be dreaded rather than savored. If you're having trouble getting motivated to study, set up a rewards system that gives you perks for doing the right thing. If you study an hour a day for a week, reward yourself with your favorite luxury: a delicious dessert, extra time on video games, or for the more health-conscious, a pleasant jog in the park. Whatever inspires you, use it as a reward for doing the right thing.

Smart Health Habits

A STRONG BODY MAKES A STRONG MIND

The back-to-school season is all about getting a good start for the upcoming year. Decisions that are made now will shape things for a long time to come.

That makes it an ideal time to focus on healthy living. Studies have shown a link between a healthy lifestyle and success in the classroom, so making improvements to your family's eating and exercise habits could improve everyone's mental health at just the right time.

Here are some simple but important steps for setting up the right habits for the school year.

GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Many studies have been conducted about how sleep affects students' grades, and a clear pattern has emerged: students who get enough hours of quality sleep consistently perform better at school.

While you're setting up your new patterns for the school year, make sure that bedtime — even for older children — is a big, clear part of the plan. Students should go to bed early enough that they get plenty of sleep at night, and they should eliminate any distractions — such as computers, TV or cell phones — that could keep them awake at night.

EAT HEALTHY FOODS

Whether you pick meals from the school cafeteria or use lunches packed at home, you should decide

now to make this a healthier eating year.

Most schools have taken big strides toward offering healthier meals in recent years, but parents should still know what's offered and what their child is choosing to eat. Older students should decide to make their own healthy decisions in the lunch line — drinking skim milk instead of chocolate milk, for example, and perhaps skipping dessert if it's offered.

When students bring their own lunch to school, that gives them more flexibility, which can be a good or bad thing. You can decide to bring foods that are either much healthier or much less healthy than the options available from the lunch line, so choose carefully and try to pack lots of fruits, vegetables and healthy grains.

EXERCISE REGULARLY

Finally, since students will be re-setting their alarm clocks at the end of the summer break, it's the perfect time to schedule regular exercise.

It can be a good idea to wake up an hour early for a morning jog or just some vigorous play time for younger children. Anything that gets your body moving will be a good thing, and the exact activity isn't as important as making it a regular part of your daily routine.



STUDY TIP:

ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS, EAT RIGHT

From must-watch TV shows to games, Facebook and cell phones, there's no shortage of things to keep you from hitting the books. To be able to focus, you've got to take time to simply turn off all the distractions so you can get intense about what you're studying. Make it a habit to "go off the grid" while you're studying, and make sure you eat healthy meals ahead of time. Nutritious food helps you feel better and focus your energy.