

How to help your kids with their back-to-school transition

"Lunches are packed. School supplies are purchased. New shoes and clothes are fitted (until those little beanstalks outgrow them - again).

It's officially back-to-school season in the Quad Cities. And that means big changes for kids of all ages - and for their parents. The carefree days of summer are behind you. As parents and caregivers, you have an important role in the transition to school days.

Wondering how to best prepare your kids for this transition? Try a few of these tips - directly from local teachers.

Stay committed to a schedule.

Whether your kids are entering kindergarten for the first time or a senior in high school, the transition to school can mean a giant schedule shift. And all kids thrive with routine and habits.

Teachers say that while bedtime is vital - wake-up time is just as important. That's because you want your kids to get to school on time, everyday. Teachers say that when kids are late for school, it starts the entire morning on the wrong foot. So start setting healthy habits early.

That means consistent bedtime and

wake-up times for your kids. (With older kids, engage them in the process of setting a bedtime and wake-up time that you can agree on.)

With younger kids, it may be helpful to set up a schedule chart to see in a common area of your home. This could include all the things that need to be done in the morning and in the evening. (For pre-readers, you can simply use clip art.)



Don't overlook the importance of food.

Teachers say that lack of sleep and food are the two issues that pop up with kids the most at the beginning of the school year. Tired and hungry kids simply can't focus on learning.

So while you are working on maintaining healthy sleep routines, think about keeping your kids filled up with healthy fuel.

You've heard that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. It's even more true with kids. If you are having trouble making time for a big breakfast every morning, get creative. Try stocking a drawer with quick-grab breakfast items like fruit and granola bars. And get your kids involved in breakfast prep.

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And don't forget lunches. Lunchtime anxiety can be a real thing for some children - from what to eat to where to sit. So, talk to your kids about what they want to eat and get feedback about how lunch is going after the first few days. (You may learn that they hate hot lunches or don't have time to eat everything you are sending in the lunch box.)

Make time for play.

The beginning of the school year can be a huge shock to the system for kids and parents alike. There are spelling words, math worksheets and group projects. Not to mention all the sports and extracurricular projects that fill up after-school time.

But, remember - kids need time to be kids. And it should be your priority to make that happen, especially when the school year is just beginning.

Make plenty of time for play and downtime after school. Give your kids some free time to enjoy and be a kid. Eat dinner as a family. Play board games. These activities are just as important to their healthy development as that folder homework. (Seriously. Teachers told us so.)

Give kids age-appropriate responsibility.

Your kids' teachers are already instilling the importance of responsibility in their classes. And you can do the same thing at home.

Even the youngest kids can empty their backpack at night and fill it the next day. (And yes, they should be carrying it themselves, too.) And as kids get older, they should have primary responsibility for their things and homework. That means you may need to let them fail and even deal with the consequences.

This can be hard as a caregiver - you want to jump in and save the day. But, kids won't learn responsibility if you do this. So, support and encourage them, but also give them the autonomy to make decisions and mistakes.

Ask questions and stay engaged.

Staying engaged with your child's education is an everyday responsibility. But it can be as simple as keeping an open dialogue with your child (and their teachers).

At the end of the day, your kids may not be as forthright about their day as you wish they were. Go beyond asking "what did you do today?"

Instead, try some of these questions (recommended by teachers):

- What did you do today to make someone else's day better?
- What did you learn?
- Who did you play with?
- Is there anyone who didn't have anyone to play with?
- Tell me about the best part of your day?

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- Tell me about the worst part of your day?
- Was anything confusing today?
- What books did your teacher read today?
- What subject made you feel like a star?
- What did you have for lunch?

Stay positive.

There may be school days that are a challenge for you and your kids. There will be problems that pop up, bad attitudes and stressful experiences. That's totally normal.

You may have to approach teachers about these issues. (And, teachers want to know about any of your concerns.)

But the very best thing you can do as a caregiver is to remain positive. Be encouraging about your child's progress. Be enthusiastic about school, teachers and even homework. The very best way to foster a love for school and learning in your kids is to model it yourself.

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KEEP GOING.

As a parent, you can be a huge part of your child's back-to-school success. And the beginning of the school year is the best time to start creating good habits and routines for you and your kids.

Will every day be perfect? Of course not.

But your support and commitment can make all the difference.

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Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 8/28/17. The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

- 1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention*
- 2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse*
- 3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors*

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

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