



## **Back to School**

As the summer activities come to a close, it's time to return to the regular routine of work and school. The academic schedule usually requires a little more organization, preparation and foresight, so that the morning rush to get out the door is minimized, and family members have all they need to start their busy days.

What kinds of things might we consider doing around the house that could make life easier and more enjoyable for all the members of your family? Besides the inevitable school supplies and clothing that will be requested, think about ways to prepare your home so that the children will be encouraged to keep their things together, and able to take care of their own daily necessities.

Let's begin with the children's rooms: are they clean and organized? Before you put away any newly purchased school clothes, go through closets and drawers and pull out any items that are no longer being used. Place clothing in one of three piles: throw away, give away and mend or clean, and follow through on those options. Return new and current clothing to its rightful space, and get rid of what's left. Tuck winter items into the back of the closet, so that seasonal favorites are easily available. Also evaluate shoes, hats, sportswear and toiletry items that may be needed in the coming weeks.

Clean closet and storage areas before you go shopping for school supplies, as you may find binders, notepads, index cards, pencils, erasers and other items in the far-reaching corners. Gather all supplies and place them together, so that they will be ready when they are needed. Check out the condition of backpacks, cleats and duffel bags before you are coerced into an expensive yet unnecessary new purchase.

Is there enough storage available for each child's clothing, school supplies, sporting equipment, and personal items? Consider additional hangers, hooks, large storage baskets and drawer dividers: if you designate a place for everything, new habits of self-responsibility can be encouraged. The kids are open to fresh ideas right now, so take advantage of their enthusiasm and help them learn to be more organized.

Other things that you may need to add to your kid's rooms include an alarm clock, a reading lamp, a bulletin board or a small desk or table for homework. Talk to your child about the school schedule, and ask them if there is anything you could add to the routine that would help prepare them for the upcoming year. The computer may need a new

program, the bathroom new shampoo, the carpool a new CD, or the pantry new and varied breakfast choices. Try to anticipate these things before the academic year begins.

What can we add to other areas of the home to help facilitate an easier transition? One suggestion may be a larger calendar that allows room to note the additional lessons, practices, meetings and other activities that the school year inevitably entails. Another idea: create a designated area for the children to store their backpacks and shoes when they arrive home. Inside the entry door used by the family, install hooks or cubbies for each child. Actually, a simple peg rack and basket will do. Make it easy and convenient for everyone to put their things away as they walk in the door so that they will know where to find what they need each day.

The school year may be the easiest time to insure that everyone eats a healthy dinner. With our busy lifestyles, eating together every night as a family is especially challenging, so think of recipes that can be prepared in the morning before work, or quickly in the evening; things that can simmer on the stove, or be re-heated individually. This way, no matter who is late from soccer practice or work, everyone has a hot, nutritious meal waiting.

The beginning of the school year is often the best time to get work done around the home. Personally, I am waiting for the teenagers to dissipate so that I can have the carpets and upholstery cleaned, and a few more quiet hours in the daytime to putter around the house. Whether you work inside or outside the home, the school year provides a safe and predictable routine for the kids, so let's get back into the groove and make the most of the possibilities.

As a favorite back to school ad teases, "It's the most wonderful time of the year."

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