

SURVIVING THE RETURN TO SCHOOL (for parents!)

Ready or not, here comes the first day of school! It's that joyful, stressful, exciting, anxiety-inducing time of year. It is the start of new teachers, maybe a new school, new routines, possibly new friends. Though it is like a clean slate and a fresh start, we may feel panic at how to keep it all organized.

I am sharing with you some strategies that have been tried and tested by me (a mom of 4) that may help you survive the return to school. But first I need to say this, for all you exhausted and frazzled parents trying to do everything on your own: ***get your child on board to help you! I am a firm believer of the notion "Do not do for your child what they can do for themselves". If your child is old enough to go to school, they are old enough to take on some responsibilities at home.***

Work together as a family to see what can easily and realistically be incorporated into your daily routine:

- Keep a ***family calendar***, either digital if all your family can and will access it, a whiteboard or an old fashion paper one. It helps prepare children for what is coming, so they know what to expect and hopefully provide smoother transitions.
- ***Prepare for the week ahead*** with meal planning for nutritious breakfasts, simple healthy lunches and suppers that are quick.
- ***Prepare the night before***. Involve your children in laying out clothes, making lunches, and packing school bags. With supervision and guidance, by age 7, (in my humble opinion) children should be able to make most of their lunch on their own.
- Set boundaries around ***bedtime routines*** and stick with it. We all know our sanity depends on it!
- As a family, commit to ***no screens at least an hour before bedtime***.
- Set a ***timer and/or have clocks*** in bedrooms and bathrooms and teach your child to keep an eye on it to stay on track.
- Create an ***accessible*** and ***convenient*** routine for all the paper that comes into your home: hanging file folders, individual storage boxes or crates, wall folders. Whatever works for you, your family and the space in your home.
- Go through letters, notes and agenda items ***each and every day***. Many tears have been shed in my house over missed permission forms and upcoming activities that they were not able to attend because we did not complete the forms!
- ***Help your child organize their tasks, chores and responsibilities*** by creating a chart, lists or reminders throughout the house. I am talking signs or notes taped to doors, TV's, mirrors such as what to pack in their backpack, their jobs, chores or homework after school.
- Schedule a regular time to ***talk to your child about their school day***. Be sure it is neutral and relaxed. I have included a list of questions for you to get your child to open up.

A tradition our family has enjoyed to bring closure to the end of summer is by doing a **memorable family activity**: picnic, going for ice cream, game night, visit a museum, have a different dinner (fondue, indoor grill, make your own pizza). Talk about some of the memories you created over the summer and what you are all looking forward to in the new school year. Your child will pick up on your feelings, both good and bad. Check in with yourself about any attitudes you may unintentionally pass onto your child about school. You have the power and influence to set the tone for success for your child and their year.

I begin each school year with enthusiastic optimism of staying organized and in control - only to feel like I am losing it by October 1st. But like we teach our children: every time we fall, we get back up again! Welcome back to Northern Gateway Public Schools! We are all in this together, we got this, and we are just getting started!

This article was written by Tammy Chark. She is the Division Social Worker for Northern Gateway Public Schools and is a support and advocate for students and families to promote wellness and success in school. Tammy has been a Registered Social Worker for more than 25 years and is a mother to 4 children; 1 in high school and 3 in university.