



## **BACK IN THE SCHOOL OF THINGS; POSITIVELY TRANSITIONING BACK**

Parents and children's feelings about the return to school (back to reality) are often mixed. Some parents can't wait for this change. Others are saddened that the fun of summer is ending and free time with their children will be changing. Kids often have mixed feelings as well. On one hand, they miss seeing their friends on a daily basis and may be getting bored with summer activities. On the other hand, most kids don't jump up and say, "I can't wait to get back to school!"

How do we handle this inevitable transition as positively and smoothly as possible?

The overall theme is **PLAN AHEAD!** Remember to look at this as a transition, not a single event. Making small changes to the daily routine a few weeks ahead of time can make a big difference. As parents, we often have lots of good ideas but putting them into practice can be another story! So don't plan to make multiple changes. Instead, focus on two or three priorities.

Begin gradually adjusting bed time. Start a few weeks before school making 15 to 30 minute changes in the actual bedtime. Make bedtime earlier by 15 minutes each week for the three weeks before school. If bedtime was 9:00 p.m., adjust to having children in bed with books to read and lights out by 8:45 p.m. Certainly, there still may be exceptions to this plan because of additional summer activities. Just try to make those times the exception versus the rule.

Another change to help ease into "back-to-school" mode might be the evening activity schedule up until bed. With children and pre-teens, it might be adding a "winding down" time that could include reading time (with or without mom or dad) versus playing right up until bedtime. With teenagers, it may be decreasing evenings out with friends or requiring an earlier return home time.

Another thought on planning ahead for parents is financial. With these tough economic times, parents need to watch their budgets. There are many ways to cut the cost of returning to school. One primary (and green) way to do so is re-using what you already have. It is common for us and our children to think that a new school year requires new supplies. We are bombarded with "back to school" advertising, and stores offer all the "must haves" stocked and ready soon after the fireworks fly on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July! Yet, we often have supplies around the house in very good condition, including backpack, lunch bag, pencils, erasers, glue bottles, and, don't forget, clothes! Check the closets for supplies and make a list before heading out to the stores. Needed purchases can be

staggered to work within the family's weekly budget starting before school and running into the school year. While our summer schedule may have to change, the weather often remains summer-like, so all those back-to-school clothes might not be needed for a few weeks.

Will kids get into power struggles with you over some of the back-to-school adjustments? Of course; that is their job! They are probably going to struggle a bit, and this is why having a time of transition is so helpful versus expecting abrupt changes. Show your kids empathy. Let them know it is normal that they don't like the changes instead of telling them "This is just how it is" (even though this is how it is!). Clearly communicate the changes in routine, but listen and hear their feelings, too. Reflecting to children and adolescents that you hear their feelings and understand their anger, disappointment, or excitement helps with transition and their development. It also helps you, as a parent, feel less overwhelmed or stressed with the shift in schedule and all that comes with the school routine.

Now that you have some "food for thought," keep in mind, inevitably, all changes do create some stress. Expect this! However, also remember there are ways to gradually work into this "back-to-school" change successfully.