



## Getting the School Year Off to a Great Start

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When August rolls around and those school supply lists come out, parents and guardians likely have their minds on what children will need for the upcoming school year. In addition to those pencils and folders, here are some tips that will help prepare you and your children and promote a great start to the school year.

- **Start discussing school with your child.** As you and your child talk about the start of school, allow them time to ask questions, express any concerns, and be sure to provide them with reassurance about the new year. If you have specific concerns, be sure to reach out to the school so that you can have your questions answered as well. And if you find yourself feeling nervous about the start of the school year, take some time prior to these discussions to use some stress management strategies (e.g., deep breathing, talking to friends, journaling) so that you can approach your child's worries in a calm, supportive manner.
- **If you are able, plan to attend orientations and back-to-school nights to stay engaged with the school.** Some of these activities will also help children prepare for their return and reconnect with people in the school that are there to support them.
- **Start getting the household into a good sleep schedule several weeks prior to the start of the school year.** As you think about what mornings will look like when returning to school, get children accustomed to the school wake time before school starts and a bedtime that allows for enough sleep each night. This is important for children of all ages, as teenagers might particularly struggle with earlier mornings - spend some time talking with teens about what might help them in the morning (e.g., a certain song as their alarm). Sleep is important for physical and mental health, as well as concentrating and staying alert during the school day, so begin thinking of how to promote this early on.
- **Consider preparing a schedule and reminder lists** so that the household is on the same page about schedule, wake and bus/walk times, what needs to happen each morning before school, and what needs to be brought to school. Children who cannot yet read might benefit from a visual list with pictures in addition to words.

- **Mornings might be less stressful if you prepare what you can for school the evening prior.** The night before school begins, it will help if you are prepared and use that evening as a calm example to show your child that you will have this evening routine to help the mornings go smoothly. Teenagers and older children can help prepare, or even pack on their own, and a reminder list of what to pack each night might be helpful.
- **There are many wonderful books about going back to school** and certain milestones in school (e.g., first day of kindergarten). If you own them, store them in a place you can remember to bring them out this time of year. Otherwise, head to the library and pick some up to enjoy. Many popular characters have books on this topic so there might be one out there with a child's favorite character for younger children.
- **Consider having a fun tradition to celebrate the first day of the school year**, like a favorite meal after the first day or a short trip to the park. Remind your child of the things and people they like about school now, and that there will still be fun time together as a family during the school year.
- **If your child seems nervous, empathize with them.** Transitions can feel tough for all of us. Listen, summarize their concerns, and offer support. You can also remind them of things they did to successfully navigate past transitions.

We hope these tips provide a few ways to smooth that transition back to school for everyone - children and adults!

*Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA's Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then "Resources" and then "Public Resources". PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.*