

# Back to School in 6 Easy Steps

## Summer Changes

Back-to-school struggles still surprise many parents. After all, kids go back to school every year -- why don't they know what to expect? Well, consider this:

- The growth rate of kids is so fast that going back to the previous year's routine can seem pretty stale.
- Kids either dread or look forward to a new school year depending on what they remember from last year. Expectations are nearly everything.
- What's it like to go back to school? Imagine a job change for you. Your kids also may be in a new building this year, which makes it even harder to feel comfortable.

### 1. Get a Grip

Your relationship with your children has a great effect on them. So it's important not to act too crazed about the return to school. Build in extra time, put irrelevant projects on hold, stay rested, and try to stick closer to your kids. Dads need to listen up, too. Many jobs seem to pick up at this time of year, and it's easy to get sucked down by the undertow.

### 2. Case the Joint

Even if your child knows the school well, it still feels good to get reacquainted. Many children are always crabby until they saw their classroom, thought about the schedule, met their teacher, and picked out their clothes. Your kids may enjoy getting a "sneak preview" with another child from her school or class. Call before you go, since school buildings may be open the Saturday before opening day.

### 3. Don't Clean the Slate

Fresh starts are so promising that parents tend to overdo them. This may seem like a great time to clean up, sort out, and set new ground rules for family life. Chores are reassigned, allowances renegotiated, and after-school sports and activities scheduled. While change is good, the timing requires some reflection. Too much too soon can make even the most cooperative child balk. Focus on the start of school, and revisit the other issues after your kids feel more settled.

### 4. Be Reassuring

Tell your kids that they'll be fine! Before school starts, encourage them to reconnect with school buddies they may not have seen over the summer. This may take some brokering, depending on the particular social appetite of your child, but its money in the bank for reducing fears of isolation in the new classroom. If they want to, let them take part of their sticker or baseball card collection to school (with the teacher's approval). Listen to their worries and don't minimize, dismiss, or try to talk them out of them. These fears are real to your child.

### 5. Set the Stage

Shopping for supplies and clothes should be fun, but overdoing this can be boring and a little scary to kids. Spend time thinking together about quiet time and reading and work space in the house. Choose special places, like corners of rooms, or certain tables or chairs, to show your kids that you'll help them find space where they can do the things that matter, like reading and homework.

### 6. Meet the Teacher

Your child is still young enough to feel comforted by an open communication between parent and teacher. In fact, when parents and teachers have regular discussions about school and home events, kids feel a more trusting connection with the school as a whole, and tend to try harder both socially and academically. Check-ins about new or recently lost pets, family moves, births, and deaths can help a teacher fathom something in your child that might otherwise seem mysterious. Most good schools would rather know sooner than later if you are worried about your child's school experience.