

Family Lives – Establishing a School Routine

The key to a stress-free school run begins with an organised routine. The amount of tension generated by running around the house searching for your children's P.E. kits, homework or school bag – when you should already be on your way to school – is huge. Being persistently late also affects a child's attainment and ability to settle. But the frantic atmosphere can be avoided with a bit of organisation. Much distress can be avoided through helping your child establish a regular routine.

Get prepared the night before - A stress-free morning should start with an organised evening routine. Being prepared the night before is key. You'll cut out a lot of unnecessary steps in the morning, which will allow you to focus on the more important tasks like eating, washing and dressing. Have a checklist of what you need to prepare the night before which might include:

- School uniform (inc. shoes, socks, etc.)
- Packed lunches – make any sandwiches and prepare all food so it's ready to go
- Check that all homework has been completed
- Sign any letters or paperwork for the school
- Pack the school bag
- P.E. kit depending on the day
- By getting your children involved in this step, it will encourage them to develop responsibility for their possessions.
- Checking the timetable together

Get up early - In the morning, ensure that everyone wakes up with more than enough time to get everything done. Think about how much time you reasonably need to get ready...then add on another 20 minutes.

Plan breakfast - Your children will be easier to feed if they are given options. Obviously there will not be time for specific orders, but a choice of cereals or different spreads for toast will help children feel in control, and encourage them to look forward to breakfast. Some children don't feel hungry at home, then become ravenous on the way to school. If that's the case, you could give them a cereal bar or perhaps some dried fruit to take with them so they've something to eat before the bell goes. And it's usually a good idea to have breakfast before getting washed and dressed to avoid last-minute disasters needing a change of uniform.

Getting dressed - Getting dressed is another time-consuming task for primary school children, who are often easily distracted by other far more interesting activities! Organising their uniform the previous evening will get rid of any worries about not being able to find it. However, some children still don't like getting dressed. Resist the temptation to get too involved with helping your child get dressed. If you take over, and always tie shoes or do up buttons, your child is likely to struggle to do it themselves after P.E. and could end up feeling distressed. Getting up earlier on a school day, leaving more time for the children to dress will quickly help them become more independent. Don't worry if they don't do it perfectly at first – they'll gradually get better with practice.

Get ahead - Once being more organised in the morning has become a habit, you'll be amazed to find that you may even have some time in hand before you need to leave the house! This benefits both you and the kids and gets the day off to the right start. Now, if something unexpected occurs, such as a lost book or P.E. kit, there will be more time to find it. And when you do the school run, everyone's in a better mood.

Back to school after holidays - The return to school can trigger a range of emotions in parents and children. Parents may feel sadness that extended time together as a family is over, mixed with relief that they don't have to provide all-day care while their children are at school. Children may feel excited at a new term and being back with friends, or apprehensive at what awaits them. Problems at home or at school can make the prospect of going back distressing. Young people may react to family conflict by being reluctant to leave home or by lacking confidence with their peers. Those who are approaching a change – going from nursery to primary, primary to secondary or starting a significant year with important exams – may feel particularly uncomfortable, as may their parents. Parents who did not have a positive experience of school may, without realising it, pass on their anxiety to their children or find it difficult to support their children by communicating with their teachers. Children benefit from encouragement and reassurance from their parents about going back to school, and from having anxieties listened to and taken seriously.