

Five Strategies for Smooth Operating for the New School Year

Regardless of how last year went the new school year starts off full of promise and potential. Let's take a moment and look at some strategies that can improve the probability of a successful school year for both you and your child.

1. Goals – Yours and Theirs

One of the most effective ways to get the school year started is to imagine it is over. Help your child visualize what it would look like if they had a great year. What kind of grades would they have, what would their social life be like, what activities would they have gotten involved in, what new skills or hobbies would they have developed?

If your child has not performed up to their potential and you believe they are not putting in the appropriate effort, bring your concerns out in the open in a curious, non-confrontational manner where your child can feel comfortable sharing their side of this concern. Most children genuinely want to do well in school. If you suspect that your child might be struggling more than seems typical for their age or grade, speak to a qualified professional about your concerns. Noted Psychiatrist and Professor at Harvard Medical School, Ross Greene's mantra is "Kids do well IF they can". If they are not, chances are there is a developmental delay or an unsolved problem.

2. Communication with Your Child's Teacher

Depending on your child's age and how well they manage school, you may want to reach out to your child's teacher during the first 2 weeks of school. In most cases, you can send a one-page letter letting your teacher know a bit about your child. Include your child's strengths, areas they may struggle with, methods and strategies that have been effective in the past, and any other concerns you may have. Be sure to include the best way and time to contact you (phone, cell, email). If your child has an IEP or a 504 plan you can assume the teacher has read it, but perhaps include any vital information you feel is important to highlight.

One important step that many parents overlook is speaking directly with their own child first. Ask your child how they think they learn best in class. Where do they sit to concentrate best, how do they feel about being called on in class, how well do they keep up with the pace of the class, and what other concerns or suggestions they may have to help them learn best. Communicating these needs to your child's teacher will give the teacher important insights to help your child adjust to the new year.

3. Time Management

Effective time management skills are helpful to all adults and children. One of the most important skills school age children must learn is understanding where their time is going and how to prioritize and guard their time. For young children, you can play a game of "beat the clock" or "guess how long" to help them understand how long different activities such as getting

dressed, cleaning up, and getting ready for school really take. This way when they beg for more playtime you can work with them to see how much time they really have available. For older children, ask them to estimate how long each of their homework assignments and other daily responsibilities will take them each night for a few nights. Have them compare this to the actual time they spend, including setting up and packing up. Then they, too, will be able to allocate their time and manage it more effectively.

4. Organization: Both at School and at Home

Certainly, the more organized we are the calmer and smoother our day will be. Here are some basic tips for helping the whole family operate more effectively.

a. Get organized the night before. Review the calendar, pack up the backpacks, and pick out clothes for the morning.

b. Have a Staging area in each bedroom and the kitchen. This is where you will place anything that needs to leave the room next time you exit. Have your children pick a spot in their room to place their backpacks, school projects, items they need for afterschool activities, etc. Help them develop the habit of placing these items here at night before they go to bed. Having everything in one spot when it's time to leave will make the morning less hectic for all.

5. Technology – Low Tech and Inexpensive

One of the most valuable tools to have on hand is a simple kitchen timer. Having an external reminder that it is time to transition can make it easier to relax and be fully engaged in the current task at hand. Timers are also a great device to help children experience and concretize the passage of time. You can use it to signal dinnertime, clean up time, bedtime, etc. so that you don't have to be the constant reminder.

Another useful device is a simple dry erase board. It can be used for reminder notes, organizing a project, math scratchboard, to do lists, prioritizing homework, etc. Each child can have their own to use and you can keep a family one in the kitchen.

Take some time to involve your children in the *process* of how you manage your lives together; the Why and the How you decide about managing day-to-day responsibilities. Encourage them to take part in how you organize their time and materials so that they can learn the steps and decisions involved along the way. By including them in the process of decision making you will accomplish three things:

- You can help them become AWARE of, and even RELISH the fact that they are CAPABLE and CREATIVE in devising what can work for them.
- They will take more OWNERSHIP and PRIDE in the systems they develop and likely become more COOPERATIVE because they helped develop the plan.
- They will be developing an important LIFE SKILL that they will learn to tweak as time, situations and growth occur.

Always remember, growth doesn't always happen when you expect it to, but over time you will see the blossoming of the seeds you plant. Enjoy this year.

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