

Back to School Tips for Parents

Yes, it's that time of year again! I am often surprised when retail stores start their advertisements for back-to-school supplies at the end of July. Although many students do not want to think about school before the first day back, it is important for parents to prepare their children in advance in order to help combat those first day jitters. Many individuals, whether it's their first time entering the high school or are a returning student, get nervous before the start of school. The following information recommended by the National Association for School Psychologists (NASP, 2004) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, 2009) provide practical parental tips to help avoid some of those back to school concerns and to prepare your children for a healthy and successful school year.

*Welcome to the
Jericho High School's
Psychology Corner!*

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**For the parents' of incoming
9th graders or new entrants,
please have your child attend
New Student Orientation on
August 26 , 2010**

Before school preparation

Physical and mental health

- Be sure to schedule doctor and dental checkups before school starts.
- Discuss any concerns you have over your child's emotional or psychological development with your pediatrician. Your doctor can help determine if your concerns are normal, age-appropriate issues or require further assessment. Your child will benefit if you can identify and begin addressing a potential issue before school starts.

Review all of the information sent from school

- Review the material sent by the school as soon as it arrives. These packets include important information about your child's teacher, room number, school supply requirements, sign ups for after-school sports and activities, school calendar dates, bus transportation, health and emergency forms, and volunteer opportunities.

Keeping up with your calendar

- Mark important dates, especially back-to-school nights on a calendar. This is especially important if you have children in more than one school and need to juggle obligations.

Copies of medical records

- Keep copies of all your child's health and emergency information for reference. Health forms are typically good for more than a year and can be used again for camps, extracurricular activities, and the following school year.

Re-establish the bedtime and mealtime routines

- Plan to re-establish the bedtime and mealtime routines (especially breakfast) at least 1 week before school starts. Prepare your child for this change by talking with your child about the benefits of school routines in terms of not becoming over tired or overwhelmed by school work and activities. Include pre-bedtime reading and household chores if these were suspended during the summer.

Turn off the TV and minimize the use of computer

- Encourage your child to play quiet games, do puzzles, flash cards, color, or read as early morning activities instead of watching television. This will help ease your child into the learning process and school routine. If possible, maintain this practice throughout the school year. Television is distracting for many children, and your child will arrive at school better prepared to learn each morning if he or she has engaged in less passive activities.

Visit school with your child

- If your child is entering the high school as a freshman or new entrant this September, visit the school with your child. Meeting the guidance counselor, locating their classroom, locker, lunchroom, etc., will help ease pre-school anxieties and also allow your child to ask questions about the new environment. Moreover, arrange for your child to attend the Freshman Orientation in August.

Designate and clear a place to do homework

- At the high school level, the adolescent should have the option of studying in their room or a quiet area of the house. However, it is important to monitor their progress and make sure they are doing their work (i.e., not on cell phone, texting, computer).

Suggestions for the first week of school

Clear your own schedule

- To the extent possible, postpone business trips, volunteer meetings, and extra projects. You want to be free to help your child acclimate to the school routine and overcome the confusion or anxiety that many children experience at the start of a new school year.

Make lunches the night before school

- Older children should help or make their own. Give them the option to buy lunch in school if they prefer and finances permit.

Leave plenty of extra time

- Make sure your child has plenty of time to get up, eat breakfast, and get to school.

After school

- Review with your child what to do if he or she gets home after school and you are not there. Be very specific. Adolescents should have a routine that includes but not limited to chores, homework, studying, and activities.

Review your child's schoolbooks

- Talk about what your child will be learning during the year. Share your enthusiasm for the subjects and your confidence in your child's ability to master the content. Reinforce the natural progression of the learning process that occurs over the school year. Learning skills take time and repetition. Encourage your child to be patient, attentive, and positive.

Send a brief note or email your child's teacher

- Let the teachers know that you are interested in getting feedback on how and what your child is doing in school. Be sure to attend back-to-school night and introduce yourself to the teachers. Find out how they like to communicate with parents (e.g., through notes, e-mail, or phone calls). Convey a sincere desire to be a partner with your children's teachers to enhance their learning experience.

Familiarize yourself with the other school professionals

- Make an effort to find out who it is in the school who can be a resource for you and your child. Learn their roles and how best to access their help if you need them. This can include the principal; assistant principal(s); school psychologist, counselor, and social worker; teachers, coaches, and school nurse.

Please keep in mind that it is common for children to be nervous about their first day back to school. As the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and National Association for School Psychologists (NASP) states, many children feel uneasy about their first day; therefore, it is important to plan ahead and remain positive in order to help combat your child's concerns. In addition, if you feel that your child is experiencing more than the typical back to school jitters, please contact your child's school guidance counselor, psychologist, or social worker. I hope that everyone has a healthy and positive school experience this year!

References

Back to School Tips. Retrieved July 29, 2010 from The American Academy of Pediatrics database. <http://www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/augschool.cfm>

Feinberg, T. & Cowan, K.C. (2004). Back-to-School Transitions: Tips for Parents. Retrieved July 29, 2010 from the National Association for School Psychologist database. <http://www.nasponline.org>