

Your EAP|Here4TN! for you and your family

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PROGRAM

Back to school prep

As the summer of 2016 wanes, people with school-age children realize it's time to start thinking about a new school year. Why not take a little extra time this year to put some pep into your back-to-school prep?

The new school year can be full of excitement, but it also can also generate uncertainty, anxiety and jitters—for children and parents alike. If your family typically struggles to get organized and kick off the school year smoothly, here are some suggestions for managing better.

Share your expectations. Decide how you want to manage everything from homework to outside-of-school activities, to morning and evening routines. Explain the guidelines to your children. Review after-school rules, such as who else is allowed in the house (if anyone) and procedures for checking in with you. Prepare to enforce family rules consistently.

Start cutting screen time. As school approaches, reduce the amount of time children are allowed to spend with electronic screens. Instead of letting the TV or phone set the tone, encourage children to play quiet games, color, or read prior to the school day. This can help ease children's transition back into learning.

Arrange a school visit. If you have a child starting school for the first time or switching schools, set up an appointment to tour the school and meet your child's teacher(s) in advance. This can help demystify the environment for your child. Attend a parents' orientation. If your child has special needs or family life circumstances that have changed, inform the teachers.

Prep the homework zone. Set up a neat, organized, quiet area where children can do their homework without distraction. Stock it with this year's required school supplies.

For young children, start the routine early. Simulate the school-year wakeup time at least one week before school actually starts to ease the transition. See the article on page 2 for more.

Complete forms and review important school dates. Get an early start on completing health and emergency contact forms. Mark important school schedule dates on the family calendar—which helps if you have children attending more than one school.

The calendar just keeps on turning. Can you believe that it's about time to head back to class?

If you have school-age children, you're well aware that those "lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer" will be ending soon. It's the parent's role to take the lead in transitioning back to academic focus and routine schedules. However, it helps to recognize that the back-to-school experience can be a struggle for both children and parents alike in many families. It's normal to encounter some bumps in the road before the school year smooths out.

Your ParTNers EAP is in place to help you and your family with transitions, including school challenges of all kinds. Confidential in-person and telephonic counseling is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Just call toll-free **1.855.Here4TN** (1.855.437.3486). For even more health and wellness resources, visit www.HERE4TN.com.



A fresh start to a new school year

Transitions are tough. The back-to-school push is one of the biggest transitions that families face all year, particularly if children are attending school for the first time or changing schools. If parents can set a positive tone for children regarding the new academic year, the whole family will benefit. Here are some ideas for kicking things off right.

- **Emphasize the positive.** Throughout your preparations for the new school year, strive to maintain an upbeat, positive attitude regarding school. Research shows that children usually do better when parents convey their trust in the school, the teachers and the new environment.
- **Establish a night-before routine.** Reduce your every-morning stress by getting into the habit of picking out clothes for the next day and getting backpacks ready before bedtime.
- **Highlight the new opportunities.** When talking about the new school year with children, offer positive descriptions of the new and interesting things they can expect. Preview some of the new activities that your kids may consider for this year—meeting new (and old!) friends, and taking part in clubs, sports, music, drama, student government, school trips and more.
- **Have a plan for healthy meals.** Over the weekend, plan the coming school week's nutritious meals for the family. Deciding on a menu and shopping for it in advance will cut down on the frantic mealtime rush during the week.
- **Plan to get involved.** If you haven't previously been involved in your child's activities, try to do so this year. Make an effort to meet other parents. If your schedule will allow it, volunteer to help in a classroom or help coach a school sports team. Remember to ask your children about what they experienced and learned in school—every day. By asking questions and listening to the answers, you'll show children that their education is very important to you.

Source: *SchoolFamily.com*.

The importance of a schedule

To get them back into the school groove with minimal discomfort, consider transitioning to a school-equivalent schedule before school actually starts. Here are some tips:

- Resume the school-type schedule at least a week early.
- Particularly with younger children, it helps to practice in advance going to bed, waking up, getting dressed and having a good breakfast at the same time as the regular school week. Kids are then likely to be more energetic and ready to learn once the first day of school arrives.
- As the summer comes to a close, you might start moving the bedtimes and wakeup times earlier in 15-minute increments (for example, to 9:00 from 9:15 at night).
- Late in the summer, move your child's home lunchtime toward that of the school schedule.
- Even teens who have been sleeping past noon all summer can benefit from a gradual shift to an earlier wakeup time.

Reduce anxiety for you and your child

Here are some tips on how to counter those first-day butterflies that both you and your child may experience.

If this is the first time your child will be away from you during the day, ease him or her into it. Start by setting up a partial day spent at a close relative or friend's house.



Pick a fun phrase or gesture you can share with your child each day prior to parting for school. Repeated use of the familiar phrase can comfort the child and smooth the morning farewell.

Your child can get reassurance from one of the many age-appropriate books showing children overcoming their fears about school.

Describe for your child how you once felt scared when starting something new. Explain how most children have these feelings, yet everything turns out fine—and that he or she will be fine too.



Even though you may be feeling back-to-school jitters all over again, try to be calm and positive.



If children express hesitancy about the coming year, acknowledge their feelings but express your confidence that they can handle the challenges.

Fun back-to-school traditions

- Have a home fashion show where children can show off each of their school outfits.
- Prepare a special, healthy breakfast for the first day of school. Such as a frozen fruit smoothie or **No-Bake Cereal Bars**.
- Do family reading together such as the Dr. Seuss book, "Oh, the Places You'll Go!" to inspire adventure and confidence prior to school. Reread favorites next year.
- Take plenty of pictures of the children heading off to school on the first day.
- For younger children, include a love note from mommy or daddy in their backpack or lunch.
- If children seem anxious prior to the first school day, tell them they can look forward to doing something fun with you after school such as riding bikes, walking the dog, going to the park or grabbing a snack at their favorite treat eatery.