

Back-To-School Tips (/index.php/local/26-community-corner/5079-back-to-school-tips)

BY ETHEL SALOMON . COMMUNITY CORNER (/INDEX.PHP/LOCAL/26-COMMUNITY-CORNER) . SEPTEMBER 01 2021

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Transitioning back into a school schedule and easing those back-to-school jitters can be challenging, but these tips can set you and your children up for a strong and successful school year.

Back to Basics – None of us has a strong day when we are tired or “hangry.” Before bed, use a wind-down routine, like setting out clothing and packing lunch with enough healthful snacks and water to get through a long day. A brief morning routine minimizes tantrums and helps you get out the door on time.

Acknowledge Nervous Feelings – Set a positive tone by validating your child’s feelings as you assure them that they are natural, and others might be feeling nervous, too. Be honest and encouraging about your own feelings, while also setting a positive tone about the future. Say, “Being apart is tough and I’m going to miss you, too. But I look forward to hearing about your day when you come home.”

Calm Confidence – Model trust in your own capabilities. Let your children see you tackle tasks with optimism. You do not have to be perfect; rather, focus on your positive efforts to get things done. Confident people do not let failure get in the way; they navigate around impediments.

Knowledge – What time is lunch? Where is the bathroom? What is my bus number? Whether a child is transitioning from elementary school to middle school or moving to a larger campus or different school, talk with your child about what it might feel like. All transitions take a while to get used to; help them set realistic expectations, and let your child know that it can take about a month to get used to new systems. Assure him that you will be there to help him get through it.

Teacher Communication – Building strong partnerships with teachers will help your child thrive. Don’t be afraid. If there is anything going on that might affect your child’s learning, fill the teacher in. Knowing the context of the situation allows the teacher to be sensitive and gives your child the best chance for success.

Offer positive attention as the best way to influence your child’s behavior. General praises like “Good job!” offer recognition. Specific, labeled praises like “Great job starting your math homework right away!” or “I appreciate that you put the dishes in the sink” celebrate the efforts put in.

Sensitive support – Set time between schoolwork and home life. Plan a fun activity for after school. Help kids explore their own interests and attain new skills. No time? Even a quick check-in over breakfast or at bedtime reinforces your support in facing challenges together and builds confidence.

Create Routines and Schedules – Rituals and predictable structures support emotional well-being. Setting activities at defined times lets your child know what is coming. Eliminating some decision-making increases efficiency and consumes less time and effort. Create a goodbye ritual, like a “high five” or a special saying like, “See you later, alligator!” These routines will help your child feel safe and loved, even when separating.

Hear Your Child. Put what you think you have heard in your own words. Resist the urge to jump into “fix-it” mode. Using open-ended questions supports your child with empathy and may reveal real concerns. Questions like “Is there something about today that was hard for you?” or comments like “I know you were really nervous about _____, but you did it. You are so brave!” can open healthy, supportive discussions.

Organization – Keep supplies and information organized. Prepare a box of “cool” school supplies. Use a family calendar for schoolwork and activities. Determine places for doing homework: one in the main family area with adult support and one in a more private and quiet area to study. Keep lists of websites, passwords, and texts with supplies. Allow children to choose new supplies that will motivate them to work. Use color-coded folders and notebooks. Make sure to clear out folders and backpacks once a week.

Outlook – Be optimistic, yet realistic about new routines. Focus on the positives. Kids look to their parents for clues. If you appear overwhelmed, your children may follow your lead. When parents listen and help children find strategies to solve problems, kids feel prepared with tools and ready to take on each day.

Love yourself as you love your child. Self-care often makes it to the bottom of the to-do list. One has to intentionally create time and space to decompress and recharge. Take a walk around the block alone or quietly breathe once the kids are in bed. Remind yourself that within a few short weeks, you and your family will be smelling the sweetness of “back to school” success.

Ethel Salomon is the director of the Hidden Sparks Parent Education Center in Queens, which provides free parent workshops and counseling to parents of NYC yeshivah and day school students who receive Title 1 services in their schools. For more information about how the center can help you, please visit www.HiddenSparkPEC.org (<https://www.hiddensparks.org/parent-education-center/>).

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