

8 back-to-school tips for parents

The hustle and bustle of sending your kids back to school can be stressful. Here are eight tips to help you stay stress-free and prepare for the coming school year.

By Jackie Middleton



Back-to-school stress doesn't just affect your kids; it takes its toll on you, too. Follow our tips and discover how you can remain calm and stress-free during this hectic yet exciting time of year.

1. Shop strategically.

With back-to-school commercials hitting our TV screens earlier and earlier each year, it's easy to fall prey to the anxiety that they generate. "People end up overbuying," says Beverly Beuermann-King, a stress and wellness specialist with Worksmart Livesmart.

"Your kids don't really need five new outfits; buy only what your kids really need." Figure out what they've outgrown, then determine what they need to fill in those gaps and purchase accordingly. It shouldn't be a grand – and painfully expensive – shopping event.

When it comes to shopping for supplies you might want to wait until after the first day of school, when supply lists are often sent home. "Sometimes waiting helps you be a bit more economical," says Beuermann-King.

2. Get everyone on a schedule.

Kids find comfort in routine, and having stress-free kids makes for stress-free parents. By creating a schedule for doing homework, going to bed, waking up, eating breakfast and taking showers, you can make the daily routine less chaotic for everyone.

Beuermann-King recommends getting your children involved in making the schedule. "Having your kids decide on the routine will be less frustrating than you telling them that they have a certain amount of time in the morning or that they have to get their homework done as soon as they come home," she says.

By adding their input, your kids will be less frazzled and more co-operative – and you'll be less stressed as a result.

3. Plan ahead.

To eliminate disorder at home, designate where school bags and supplies will be stored and stock plenty of lunch options. "Look for ways to simplify life as opposed to complicating it," says Beuermann-King.

Your kids can put away their own belongings and easily find them the next day. They can even pack their own lunches, saving you time and anxiety.

4. Make time for breakfast.

You tell your kids that breakfast is the most important meal of the day but do you follow your own advice? Eating breakfast before you head out the door will stave off hunger pains, boost your energy and help you keep your focus for wherever the day takes you.

"Your mood goes up and down the same way your kids' [moods] do when it comes to food and energy," says Beuermann-King. Skip sugary cereals and carbohydrate-laden meals. Instead, opt for a protein-rich breakfast that includes eggs, oatmeal or turkey bacon.

The protein will provide plenty of energy until lunchtime, and will prevent spikes in blood-sugar levels that can leave you irritable and anxious.

5. Choose extracurricular activities carefully.

When kids are enrolled in too many after-school activities, it creates a one-way ticket to parental overload. Select one or two activities for your child that won't wear you out with driving duties. It's also really helpful to lean on fellow parents.

"Don't be afraid to ask for help and carpool with other parents. You'll end up driving a few times every few weeks and it will cut down on travel time," says Beuermann-King.

6. Arrange 'me time.'

Zap back-to-school stress with mandatory parental down time. Whether you use the break to sleep in, have date night or curl up with the latest bestseller, reserving time for yourself is key to restoring vitality and alleviating stress. Just be sure to schedule the time into your week and stick to it. "We usually give up our 'me time' first," says Beuermann-King. "One of the quotes that I like is: 'How thin can I spread myself before I no longer exist?' We're so used to taking care of everybody else that we forget to take care of ourselves."

Don't forget your own needs. You can't look after others if you don't look after yourself.

7. Laugh.

Having a hearty giggle is a great stress buster. Studies have shown that laughter crushes cortisol and epinephrine, our brain's stress hormones. It also boosts your

immune systems.

"As adults, many of us have lost the ability to laugh and have fun," says Beuermann-King. "Make sure you laugh and enjoy." Keep a file of humorous email jokes or photos that you can turn to in a pinch, or watch funny movies and TV shows to reap the healthy benefits of laughter.

8. Get quality sleep.

"Two-thirds of Canadians are sleep-deprived, and they're not getting good-quality sleep. It's the only time when your body repairs itself, so if you're not sleeping long enough or getting the right kind of sleep, then your body is already in a deficit and can't deal with stress," says Beuermann-King.

Aim for between seven to nine hours of sleep and cut out caffeine before bedtime. During that time, you should also forgo watching TV, exercising and working on brain-taxing activities such as managing your finances.

Your brain needs to slow down before bedtime so that you can fall asleep quickly and snooze soundly.