

BACK-TO- SCHOOL: AVOID MORNING CHAOS

By Rebecca A. Stanwyck, LCSW

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Summer's over, school is back in session, and traffic is heavier again! Most parents I know are relieved when school starts up, but dread dealing with groggy kids who dawdle over breakfast and make their parents late for work. Here are some tips to help you and your kids get back in the school routine, and avoid stress and chaos in the morning:

1. **Plan ahead.** Buy or make a calendar with a column for each person in the family, so you can keep track of school and after-school activities, project due dates, etc. On Sunday, plan out the week ahead so everyone knows what their responsibilities and commitments are.
2. **Establish a regular routine,** and assign tasks and responsibilities to each child – for after school and evening as well as morning. Kids benefit from consistency, and good habits learned early will last a lifetime.
3. **Go to bed earlier.** Most adults need at least 7 hours of sleep, and most children and teens need at least 9. Help your kids wind down for bed half an hour in advance, with relaxing activities like reading, taking a bath, or listening to (quiet) music.
4. **Get everyone their own alarm clock** (or two, for sound sleepers!). You can also have a bedside lamp put on a timer, and set to go off 15 minutes before the alarm, because exposure to light helps the body awaken.
5. **Get up half an hour before the kids get up.** Stretch, shower, walk the dog, drink a cup of coffee – whatever helps you get ready to face the day, so you'll be better able to help your kids face theirs. *I've found this is the single most effective tip for making mornings manageable!*
6. **Limit morning decisions:** if your kids pack a lunch, have them prepare it, or help you prepare it, the night before. They can also decide the night before what to eat for breakfast, and select their clothes for the next day.
7. **Limit morning showers to 5 minutes** – just enough time to help with waking up (and to take care of sleep-mussed hair). Or have kids shower or bathe the night before, which will help them relax for sleep - then just a splash of cold water on the face and a wet comb on the hair will suffice in the morning.
8. **Quick and nutritious breakfast options:** for light eaters, milk and a banana, or a carton of low-fat yogurt. Protein shakes are easily whipped up in the blender. Frozen waffles, PB&J sandwiches, and granola bars can be eaten on the way to school (and teeth can be brushed at school, if they keep a small toothpaste and brush in their pack).
9. **Have a set place for everything:** backpacks, jackets, lunch money, car keys. A checklist by the door can also help to avoid those frantic, last-minute searches, and prevent having to double back after you're already on the road.
10. **Keep a sense of humor, and be flexible.** One of the best stories I ever heard was from a mother of five who was at her wits' end with one son who simply could not get moving in the morning: the solution she finally arrived at was to have him bathe and dress in his school clothes (minus shoes) the night before, so all she had to do in the morning was get him out of bed and into the car (where she had his shoes and a breakfast bar waiting). Her mother-in-law was aghast that the boy's clothes and hair were rumpled, but no one else minded, and sanity was restored to the family's mornings.