



Ten Back-to-School Strategies

By Terry Matlen, MSW, ACSW



FOR THE FRIDGE

THE END OF SUMMER is a mixed bag for most. Kids are sad to let go of leisurely, stress-free days. Parents are wary of what yet another school year will bring but also welcome a quiet, peaceful house.

Children with ADHD traditionally have a tough time transitioning, whether it's from playtime to bedtime, moving from classroom to classroom, and just about everything in between. Starting school is no different.

How can you best help your child transition from summer vacation to the rigors of school?

1 Start now! Get your child into bed at least fifteen minutes earlier each night so that by the time school starts, he is into a good bedtime routine. Wake him up (or have him set his alarm) fifteen minutes earlier each morning, as well.

2 Never assume your brave or quiet child isn't concerned about starting school, whether she's six or sixteen. It's natural to have fears about the upcoming school year, so encourage your child to discuss what her worries are. Remind her that these feelings are normal and that everyone needs an adjustment period.

3 Make sure your child's ADHD treatment is optimized. Make an appointment with her doctor to discuss her current medication. Try not to make any changes just as school is starting.

4 Reassess how your child fared in school last year. Most parents don't want to think about school during the summer, but it's a good idea to sit and write down what went well and not so well the year before. This will give you a good idea about what to consider in making this year a better one for your child.

5 Write a short letter to your child's teachers and explain her learning style, what works and doesn't work and what your concerns are. Make sure you also list her strengths. You want the teachers to have a pretty good "snapshot" of your child.

6 If your child has an IEP or 504 Plan, it's time to review it and make sure his teachers all have copies of it. Remember that you can always request a new IEP if you have concerns about how your child is or will be doing this coming year.

7 Get organized! Easier said than done, but start a routine before school begins. Place a whiteboard or bulletin board in a high traffic area of the house and write down your child's schedule. Make sure you have an extra planner (or three), since there's a good chance the first one will get lost. Also, assess your child's organizing style—does she do better with a paper planner or a PDA? Does he need lots of visual cues? Or is he more likely to remember things using a digital recorder?

8 Set up an area in the house where your child can study and keep his school supplies. Does he do study better in complete silence? Or does he need background music to stay focused? Remember that everyone has their own style, so ask your child what will work best, then set up a comfortable study/homework area complete with all the materials needed for the school year.

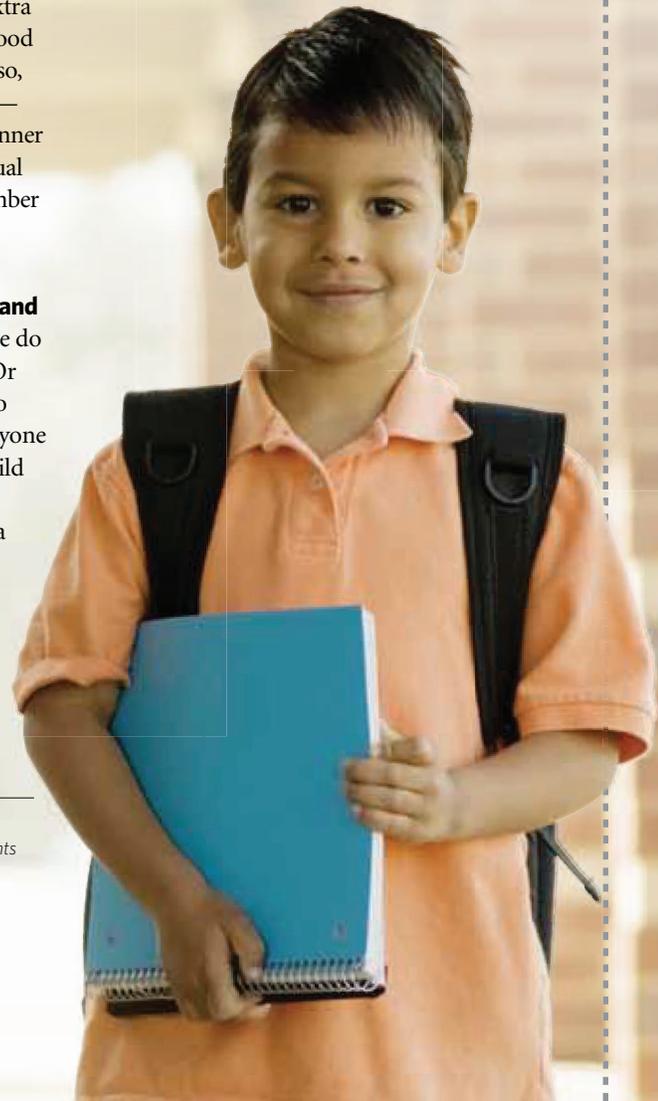
9 Come up with a system so that papers get to school and back each day. Engage your child in brainstorming the best way this can be achieved.

10 Keep your child's routine structured but also maintain flexibility if the game plan isn't working.

Doing his or her best in school is your child's job. Making sure everything is in place for that to occur is your job! Stay in close contact with the teachers—most welcome email check-ins. In fact, many parents find that emailing the teachers weekly helps to ensure that your student is staying on track. Without constant communication, it's simply too easy for your child to fall through the cracks and cause a small problem to become a major obstacle.

Remember, too, to praise your child's efforts and if necessary, reward your child for his or her hard work. **A**

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