

BACK TO SCHOOL

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” - Proverbs 22:6

Just as we get settled into the freedom of summer, the television commercials begin to remind us that the kids are going back to school. Whether your child is being homeschooled or going to a more traditional setting for academic learning, they will soon have to abandon the freedom of staying up late, sleeping in and lazy days at the beach for another year of buckling down, breaking open the books and getting homework in on time.

The days of summer will appear as a distant memory as children begin to count the days until Christmas vacation. Nevertheless, as school approaches, some children will be excited to begin a new year at school, like me (I was a strange child), but most will try to stretch out the days until the inevitable arrives. This can become a problem when the reality sinks in on the morning of the first day of school and the bliss of summer comes to an alarming halt. Getting started on a new routine can be difficult for parents and children alike, especially if they are not prepared.

For young children, beginning school is an important step toward the achievement of tolerating change and frustration as well as independence. For elementary school aged children, structure and routine will allow them to develop self-discipline. The Bible wisely instructs parents to *“train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from It”* (Proverbs 22:6 ESV). Surely our Creator was telling us that patterns learned in childhood are the tools that we use to cope and subsist when we grow up into adults.

With this in mind, I would like to offer some tips for getting back in the swing of things as well as instilling the structure and discipline we all need when we must pursue something different, difficult, or distasteful with a minimal amount of distress for you and your child.

TIPS FOR PARENTING YOUR BACK-TO-SCHOOL CHILD:

1. **Begin to talk about and prepare for going back to school early.** Children will have less anxiety about changes if they know what is going to happen and when. For small children just beginning school, you may want to create a story about going to school, how they are going to get there, what will happen and coming home at the end of the day to reinforce that they are not being abandoned.
2. **Involve your child in the process of getting ready to go back to school.** Shop for new school supplies and new clothes together to reinforce the positive aspects of starting out fresh and creating new beginnings. For those in Jr. High or High school, involve them in the registration process.

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3. **Change sleep schedules back to normal.** If your child is allowed to stay up later during the summer break, begin to alter his/her schedule, gradually making bedtimes earlier so your child's body can adapt more easily to the change in sleep schedule.
4. **Create rituals at bedtime** (checking homework, bathing, brushing teeth, reading a story, prayer, setting out clothes and supplies for the next day, etc.) and in the morning (getting dressed, washing face, eating breakfast, making sure homework is in the backpack, making lunch, kissing your child good-bye, etc.) Some parent will create a phrase or gesture that allows their child to know that they will be there for them when they return.
5. **Create a schedule for after school** related to homework, television and play.
6. **Talk to your kids about their successes and challenges.** Reinforce your child's successes and let them know that you are there to help them with their challenges.
7. **Keep your expectations realistic and nurture your child's gifts.** Not every kid is going to excel in every subject. Elementary school aged kids are eager to please and can develop a poor sense of self-worth when they are unable to measure up to their parents expectations.
8. **And above all, STICK TO IT!** Your child may challenge this structure in the beginning, but what you are doing is creating an environment that will allow your child to feel safe and know what to expect as well as develop the skills he or she will need to be successful in life.

Every family is unique and not every example can be applied in every case. The examples I used here are just that, but the principles remain the same. It may be tough at first, but applying these principles will allow your kids to be more productive and more confident as they grow into young adults. And isn't that what being a parent is all about?

If you find yourself needing help with parenting issues, or if your child is struggling as he or she heads back to school, please contact Turning Point Counseling where we can help you find a trained, compassionate, Christian Counselor to meet your needs and work within your family situation.

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