



Mornings Made Easier

Tips to help your child get ready for school.

BY CONNIE MCCARTHY

A MISSED SCHOOL BUS. FORGOTTEN

homework. Arguments over outfits. Does all this sound unbearably familiar? Don't worry, you're not alone; almost all parents have experienced some frustration about their child's morning routine. The good news is that a little patience and planning can go a long way

toward better school mornings for everyone.

Make bedtime the same time every night during the school week, even if your child doesn't go to sleep right away. As well, get your child up at the same time Monday through Friday. Plan on your child needing at least 15 to 20 minutes for personal hygiene and dressing.

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Allow enough time for a nutritious breakfast. Studies show that children who eat a balanced breakfast do better in school, are more attentive, and are better behaved. A mix of protein and carbohydrates is best. Carbs (cereals, fruits, and breads) give a quick energy boost, and protein (milk, eggs, meat, and peanut butter) sustains your child until lunch.

Prepare backpacks the night before. If your child has homework, make sure she immediately puts it in her backpack upon completion. This eliminates the "My mom forgot to put it in my backpack" excuse!

Try choosing two outfits of clothing the night before that you both agree will work. Put each entire outfit in a large plastic bag and in the morning, let your child choose which "bag" to wear that day, knowing that the clothes in the other bag can be worn the next day. This empowers your child to make choices and usually takes care of two days at a time.

Set aside at least 15 to 20 minutes to read together at bedtime. This can be done by a parent or an older sibling. This short period of individual attention usually calms a child and eliminates the "getting up" questions that often follow just going to bed.

If your child misplaces belongings such as sneakers, for example, try tracing an outline of the sneakers onto construction paper or contact paper. Then tape the tracings to the child's closet floor. At bedtime each night, make sure the shoes are sitting on their "feet" in the closet. (The same can be done for lunch boxes, backpacks, boots, etc.)

Encourage your child to talk about the upcoming school day. Planning the tasks your child will accomplish will put him in the right frame of mind to tackle the day. ❁



Teen Mornings

Adolescents are famously sleep-deprived. As with younger children, try to instill a regular bedtime, which should help the mornings go more smoothly.

Tweens and teens generally require more time to get ready in the morning, so build in enough time—at least half an hour—for personal hygiene and dressing.

In addition to homework and backpack, make sure your child gathers any other needed items, such as school library books or outfits for sports practices, the night before. Almost nothing waylays a morning more than hunting around for items like that at the last minute.

Try to make sure older children have their homework completed in enough time to allow them to wind down for a while. Likewise, try to instill a habit of no electronics (cell phones, video games, etc.) for at least an hour before bedtime.

Don't expect too much overall. While it would be nice if your child were able to make her bed and tackle a few chores before school, it might not be realistic. Focus on what absolutely must be done to reduce the chaos and forget the rest for now. In time, once a routine is in order, you might be able to add back a small chore or two.

—Elizabeth S. Leaver