

# A Teacher's Tips on Transitioning Back to School

By Carla Goldberg, NPN member since 2008

You know the "drill": pack up the summer clothes, hit the school supplies aisle and convince your child that going back to school will actually be fun. Get him out the door that first day with a breakfast bar and a lunch in his backpack and you might as well consider yourself "Supermom."

But it doesn't end there. Everybody has to get used to the new routine, family schedules have to be synchronized. As the mother of a six-year-old and a nine-year-old, and the Pre-School Director of Akiba-Schechter Jewish Day School, I experience both sides of the spectrum—the teacher's and the parent's.

I also know that it doesn't have to be difficult. The right amount of foresight and planning smoothes the transition from summer to school, sets a calmer tone for the entire year and institutes rhythms and routines that will hold their own even when life gets hectic. So, in the spirit of simplifying your kids' lives and yours, here's some advice from the inside track:

## Before school starts

1. **Visit the school—even if it's not in session.** Drive past the building on the way to the grocery store, check out the playground on the walk home. Get your child excited with specifics like, "This is where you'll press the buzzer every morning." Pretty soon, she'll start pointing them out to you.
2. Whether your child is starting a new school or returning to a familiar one, a **trip to the library** is a good idea. Read books about starting school with your child. Animal stories are ideal for younger children, since anxious readers can identify with the protagonist from afar. See sidebar for tips.
3. **Adjust your child's sleep cycle.** Summer schedules tend to be more casual, even if your child is attending camp. Make sure your child goes to bed earlier the week before school starts so that, on the first day, your early wake-up call won't catch him by surprise.
4. **Involve your child in shopping.** Spiral notebooks or loose leaf dividers? The Hannah Montana-themed lunchbox or Hello Kitty backpack? Turkey and cheese or lettuce and tomato? Include your child so that she takes ownership of decisions she'll have to live with.
5. **Consider your work schedule.** The first week of school is not the time to schedule a business meeting out of town or a late-night conference call. If possible, free up your schedule in the early mornings and late afternoons so that you can adjust to the routines yourself and are available for an emergency pick-up. Remember that you're going to need to assist with homework until your child becomes accustomed to the routine on his own. Finally, try to feel more relaxed during the morning drop-off. Your kids will feel it, too.

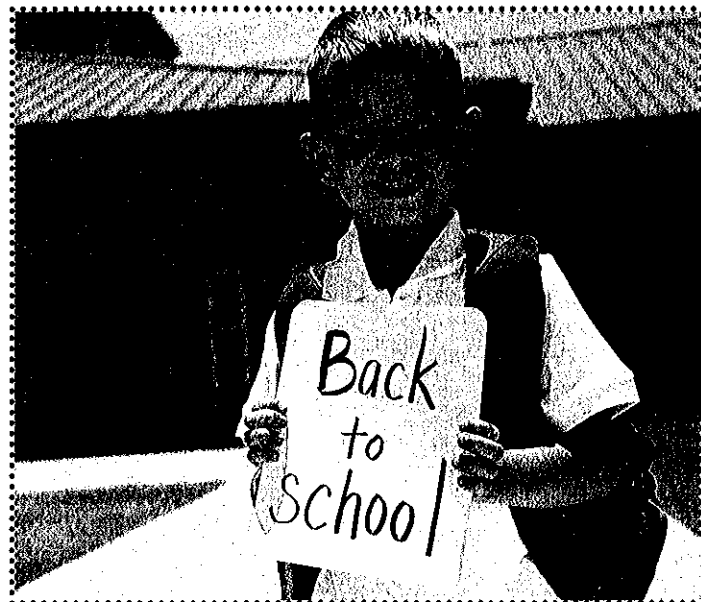
## Material makeover

Oftentimes, parents complain that their three-year-old comes home with a full lunchbox. When you select a lunchbox, make sure your child can manipulate it. Your job is to foster independence—to enable your child to help himself. Not every kid feels totally comfortable eating lunch at school right away. That said, your chances of finding an empty lunchbox are much higher if the lunchtime experience is enjoyable.

This applies to clothing as well. Label your child's clothing in front of her, and use it as an opportunity to get her excited about school. "Won't you love painting at school? We need to pack extra clothes in case paint gets on your shirt." For kids not yet fully toilet trained, reassure them. "These are extra pairs of underwear if you have an accident."

## Schedules

1. As soon as your child's school calendar is available, **enter all relevant dates into your datebook or organizer.** Electronic organizers are great for setting up reminders ahead of events so that you have enough time to assemble a costume or buy supplies for the science fair.
2. **Collect the various schedules** that compete in your family—school, soccer, ballet, art class, church, synagogue—and place them in a binder in a central location, like the kitchen. If your child is old enough, show him the binder so he feels responsibility for his schedule.
3. **Create a routine for your child when he comes home every day.** Unpack the backpack together and look at his folders. Ask to see the assignment notebook. Have a snack ready so coming home is a pleasure and his engines get refueled.
4. **Make a bedtime checklist.** Is homework in the backpack? Is the backpack sitting at the front door? Are clothes laid out? Taking care of these seemingly minor details fosters a much more peaceful morning.



## Homework

The nice part about summer is no homework. But homework is a necessary part of going to school and learning.

1. **Ask pointed questions.** Instead of "Do you have homework?" say "Show me what you're working on." Then plan with your child the best time to complete those projects.
2. **Break challenging assignments into steps.** Last year, my son's third grade teacher assigned a long-term project on Chicago architecture, which involved researching and visiting a landmark, building a model of the building and creating a presentation. Only by planning ahead was such a project doable, and when it was complete, my son couldn't have been prouder of what he had accomplished.
3. **Make sure your child has a comfortable—and clean—desk or table.** A moveable caddy is useful for doing a larger project at the dining room table. Stock it with pencils, crayons, an eraser, a ruler, etc. If your child is easily distracted, place the pencil sharpener within reach so she doesn't have the opportunity to lose her rhythm when she gets up to use it.

## Separation anxiety

Sending your child off to school, especially a little one to preschool, shouldn't mean throwing him into the deep end. This may mean working on yourself as well. You need to be okay with your child receiving support somewhere else. Otherwise, you're going to hang around long past drop-off time and your child will feel that insecurity. Ask yourself: Who really needs whom? This means not crying in front of your child. (You can cry after you leave; I certainly did.) But your child needs to know that you're excited, that you trust his teachers. Otherwise, why would you be leaving him in their care? In a sense, this is really about parent readiness. This is also why it helps to make informed decisions. As a parent of two kids—one starting fourth grade, one starting first—I see the projects the middle schoolers do, and I can't wait for my kids to have those same teachers, do those same projects. I know I've made the right choice—and my kids know that too.

*Carla Goldberg is the Kohl-McCormick Award-winning Pre-School Director at Akiba-Schechter Jewish Day School, where she has worked for more than 19 years.*

## Back-to-School Booklist

### Animal stories

- If You Take a Mouse to School* (Laura Numeroff)
- Lunch Bunnies* (Kathryn Lasky)
- First Day Jitters* (Julie Dannenberg)
- The Berenstain Bears Go to School* (Stan and Jan Berenstain)
- Spot Goes to School* (Eric Hill)

### Non-animal stories

- Go Home, Mrs. Beekman* (Ann Stampler)
- Will I Have a Friend* (Miriam Cohen)
- Junie B. Jones First Grader (At Last)* (Barbara Park)
- The Night Before Kindergarten* (Natasha Wing)
- I Am Absolutely Too Small for School* (Lauren Child)
- You Go Away* (Dorothy Corey)

### To find more titles, go to

- [teachingheart.net/backtoschoolreading.html](http://teachingheart.net/backtoschoolreading.html)
- [kidsreads.com/features/020814-school.asp](http://kidsreads.com/features/020814-school.asp)
- [mrsmcgowan.com/books/backtoschool.htm](http://mrsmcgowan.com/books/backtoschool.htm)

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# Tips to Get Organized for School

By Erin Krex, NPN member since 2009

**M**any families have trouble staying organized in today's busy lifestyle. When parents work and multiple people are in charge of running a house, it is best to be highly organized. An organized family helps children concentrate and spend time on school rather than where they left the other shoe.

1. **Prepare for changes.** When families are in a laid-back schedule during the summer, it is hard to wake up one day and be ready for the first day of school. Instead, try waking up at the correct time one to two weeks prior to school starting to get into the new routine.
2. **Clean out your closets.** As the school year begins, it is hard to find time to do much. So before school starts, clean out your closets and give away clothes that are worn out or that your children have outgrown. This will make it easier for your kids to pick out their own outfits for the next day.
3. **Create a calendar.** Make sure it has space for each family member to list appointments, activities, homework assignments and reminders. Keep it in an open area like the kitchen.
4. **Prepare for the next day.** Lay out clothes, pack lunches and pack backpacks the night before.
5. **Color coordinate.** In families with more than one child, make sure each has a specific color for all binders, backpacks and supplies.
6. **Keep a dry erase board.** This allows family members to write down items needed from the grocery store, dry cleaners or school supply store so that one person can get everything in one trip.
7. **Designate a study space.** It is best to have a study location that is neat, has all the necessary supplies and will allow children to concentrate on homework.
8. **Keep important phone numbers in a binder.** If you have numbers for doctors, workmen, teachers, etc. in one place, everyone can find what they need quickly.
9. **Open communication.** Make sure your whole family knows what is expected of them and what needs to get done each day. If you have a last-minute request, choose a place where you know everyone will look. Leave a note and they will be able to complete the task.

If you use even just a few of these tips to stay organized, your family will have more time to play and have fun together. More fun means less stress.

*Erin Krex is the mother of a five-year-old boy and works full-time as the owner of First Class Care, Inc. ([firstclasscare.com](http://firstclasscare.com)), helping place nannies, babysitters, housekeepers, house managers, personal chefs and elder care in Illinois.*