

Returning to the Routine: A Back to School Quick Study

by Nathalie Kunin

It's September, which means that it's time for you and your children to shake off the lazy days of summer and return to that trusted routine of the school year.

De-cluttering the Desk

For the last three months, your child's workspace has been the docking station for everything other than work, so it's important to take some time before classes resume to "redefine the desk." Organize all school materials (pencils, erasers, a dictionary, accordion files, etc.) into a clutter-free work area with plenty of elbowroom.

As you help tidy up, remind your child that music and snacks do not belong in the workspace. Explain why these rules are enforced – snacks are distracting, and music is counterproductive. Promote workspace independence. After all, this is their domain. Suggest hanging a bulletin board and a calendar beside the desk for posting exam reminders, keeping track of extracurricular activities and organizing long term assignments.

The Daily Struggle

We're not all morning people, so don't overwhelm your child with too many morning tasks. Instead, insist on the **Three B's**: make your **Bed, Brush** your teeth, and pack your **Backpack**. Parents, model this good behavior by being dressed, coffee-in-mug, keys-in-hand and ready to go on-time.

Parental Guidance Suggested

When you sit down with your child to select after-school activities, remember to take their workload into consideration. By second grade, students are loaded up with homework, and they should have at least **2 days a week** with no after school commitments aside from their own homework and studies. By the 4th grade, your child will have (on average) at least one hour of homework every night. By middle school, they're inundated with work. So rather than over-scheduling, perhaps choose **2 activities** with reasonable commitments, and keep an eye on your child's workload from year to year.

If your child's homework involves reading a novel, make the assignment less daunting by dividing the number of pages in the book into the number of days he/she has to complete the task. Write that magic number inside the book jacket to remind your child how many pages he/she needs to read daily.

For the younger student, try implementing a reward system for accomplishing homework on time such as a sticker chart which leads to a treat. Reward them for their independence, and they'll be less likely to procrastinate. Start good habits early in Kindergarten. Set-up an independent workspace with a range of school supplies and materials, and get them accustomed to sitting down for 15 minutes. Make it consistent: same time, same place. Encourage them to begin and complete an assignment at one time. Habituate your child to this routine, and you'll be instilling GREAT work habits for the future.

For older students, help keep them motivated and encourage them to download applications like Flashcards to make learning new definitions more appealing or educational entertainment like Words Free, in which you can compete with friends to spell out words on a virtual game board.

Finally, learn to use scaffolded assistance with children of any age. This means, offer your child just enough guidance for him or her to be successful but step back and let them do their own work. Encouraging your child's independence, while at the same time being there to support them is a tough balancing act for parents, but one that is well worth it!