

Minimizing the Chaos of School Mornings

from the American Counseling Association

Is the average school day morning at your house a 3-ring circus? Shouting parents, still sleepy kids, suddenly missing homework, and favorite clothing hiding somewhere? This is typical at far too many homes.

It doesn't have to be like that. With a few simple changes you can help reduce that school-morning frustration, stress and anger.

A starting point is that instead of blaming your kids, let them know you're not happy with how *you're* acting and that *you'd* like to change. Get them involved by letting them see that you need their help to end early morning battles.

Step one is to make your kids more time responsible. Time is a hard concept for younger children, so try a kitchen timer to help them finish breakfast and get dressed in a timely manner.

For older kids, give them an alarm clock and let them choose the time to wake up and still be ready for school without making everyone rush. Agree on a "no-snooze-alarm" rule.

Then set consequences. Agree on a favorite something they'll give up if they dawdle over breakfast or don't get up on time. But also agree to your own consequence if you fall back into morning nagging to get them moving.

Next, turn off that distracting morning TV! Instead, try background music. Studies show it actually helps some kids focus better.

Then help your kids be better organized. Create an area where backpacks and books can go, then make sure that they're in place before bedtime.

Clothing is another organization opportunity. Having the kids lay out the next day's clothes before bed avoids morning panic over missing items. Make sure hats, mittens and shoes are also ready.

A common issue is that forgotten permission slip that needs to be signed, or the last minute lunch money search. Set up an in-box for each child where papers that need signing must go right after school each day, and where the signed papers and lunch money are waiting in the a.m. Make your child responsible for dropping off the needed papers and for remembering to take them in the morning. If he forgets, then let him face the consequences.

Even with a good system, some mornings will still be hectic. But make your kids partners in getting organized and you'll make most mornings more enjoyable, as well as give them skills that can help throughout life.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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