

The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

Getting School Started On The Right Foot This Year

from the American Counseling Association

Summer school vacations are coming to an end, which may seem a blessing to many parents, or a terrible, stressful time for some kids.

But the school year can also bring a lot of the same old problems to many families. Anxious, crying younger children afraid of this big unknown adventure. Older kids falling back into past patterns of oversleeping, forgetting books and assignments and making mornings a chaotic circus.

This year consider a bit of pre-planning and organizing to help relieve stress and make the school year run a little more calmly.

A starting point for young children is to build up some enthusiasm and reassurance for what's coming. Left on their own, younger children let their imaginations kick in, which can sometimes be very frightening as they contemplate the unknown.

Instead, show your youngsters some of what the future will hold. If it's a new school, or a first time in school for your child, plan a visit. If the school is open (administrative staff are probably there by now) ask them if you can help your little one find his or her building and classroom. Changing the unknown into an "I've been there" experience can remove a great deal of the anxiety on that first school day.

With older kids, this end of the summer vacation is a good time to address potential problems before they even occur. Start is by letting them know that things will be more organized this year. Have a small basket where lunches, or lunch money, or permission slips will be waiting each morning, rather than having panicky last-minute searches. In the same way, set up designated places for school books, backpacks, shoes and jackets.

Make sure there's a good working alarm clock or two, and use a kitchen timer for those who dawdle over breakfast. Make it a rule that school clothes are laid out the night before.

Then, set up some rules about the organization system you're creating. Give kids a chance to have input on what the penalties should be if backpacks don't go in the right place, or if papers that need to be signed are forgotten till the last minute.

If they know that there's a system, that they have responsibilities and that there will be real consequences for not making it work, your students will be better prepared for their school days and a successful year.

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

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