

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

### Getting School Mornings Under Control

from the American Counseling Association

In too many homes, the average school day morning can best be described as chaos. Parents shouting, homework missing, favorite clothes suddenly hiding and a hundred other calamities that add stress to the morning and too often mean rushing to make school on time.

While there's no way to guarantee that bedlam will suddenly turn into calm, peaceful, well-organized mornings, there are ways to help reduce that school-morning frustration, stress and anger.

Start by letting the kids know you're not happy with how *you're* acting, rather than blaming it all on them. Tell them you want to change and get them involved by letting them see that you need their help to end early morning battles.

Then give your kids more time responsibility. For younger children, with little concept of time, 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 they can wake up and still be ready for school without making everyone rush. Agree on a "no-snooze-alarm" rule.

Set consequences. Discuss ahead of time 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 and yelling to get them moving.

Some general changes can also speed things up. Turn off that morning TV. Whatever the show, it only slows things down. Instead, try background music, which actually helps some kids focus better.

Get things more organized. Give the kids a designated place for backpacks and books, and make sure they're in place before bedtime.

Having kids lay out the next day's clothes before bed avoids morning panic over that missing top or jeans. Make sure hats, mittens and shoes are also ready for the a.m.

Try an in-box for papers that need to be signed, and as a place to put lunch money envelopes. Make your child responsible for putting the needed papers there after school, and for remembering them in the morning. If he forgets, let him face the consequences.

Even with a good system, some mornings will still be a 3-ring circus. But help your kids take part 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 ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.*

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