

Manage School Days for Your Kids

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School is in session. The days are growing shorter. Afterschool programs fill our days. We bring our children home from school after full days of school, work, socialization, sports, and errands. When we arrive home, all of us are tired. How can we respond to family stress when the kids are fighting, dinner needs to be made, homework needs to be completed, and we must prepare for the next day of school?

Strategies

Listed below are five key strategies to simplify your kids' school days:

Model stress management behavior. Our children learn how to respond to stress from us. When



we take a deep breath, reflect, and choose our words carefully, our children can learn from our healthy actions. Most of us cannot detach from stress quickly. Thus, we fall into the trap of evening family chaos. When we conduct ourselves calmly and respectfully, our family will be happier during the nightly routines.

Dinner strategies that support a relaxed evening.

When families arrive home from a busy day, most are looking for a break. The kids want to play or watch television. The parents want to change into their cozy clothes and just relax. The preschoolers demand their hugs and quality time with their parents. How can we unwind and adequately prepare dinner with so many demands? Some families preplan their dinners for the week and eat leftovers every other day. Some make simple meals on alternate nights while others occasionally grab prepared food at the store.

Whatever strategy you choose, plan ahead to minimize conflict and maximize quality time with your family. Set evening routines to reduce stress. Regardless of

how well you plan for nighttime needs, it is important for families to consider the best time for their children to complete homework. Some families love to get up early, eat breakfast, and review spelling words and math facts in the morning. Some children work best on their homework after outside play and a nutritious afternoon snack. Others work on homework while dinner is being prepared for the family. Parents should be flexible in helping their children organize homework schedules. Some children are ready to learn after an afternoon activity, while others like to finish homework early so that they can have free time in the evening.

Balance each school day. As the demands of the school year increase, your children may tire earlier in the day and may need guidance on how to manage their schedules. Some children love to binge watch television. Others need lots of outside time to run and stretch their muscles. Many are very social and want daily play dates with friends. We must help our children structure their day to allow sufficient time for rest, eating, relaxation, homework, and socialization. We too, will be learning as we help our children adjust their days so that they are rested, happy, and enthusiastic about their next school day.

Get help when needed. As we juggle our work schedules, family responsibilities, and the nurturing of our children's development, we may need to find added support. Many parents try to manage demanding schedules by themselves, which can be overwhelming and exhausting. Children can thrive with support shared by family, neighbors, and afterschool friends.

A child friendly schedule for working parents requires flexibility and creativity. We should use support networks to simplify our days and provide our children with loving, stimulating, and nurturing care. When the childcare and carpool schedules meet our needs, the household functions more smoothly. However, alternative plans should be identified to account for sickness, changed schedules, and childcare adjustments.

Humor

Although daily school schedules are difficult, this stage of our children's development must be met with humor, flexibility, and love. Our children will grow up quickly. We will soon be laughing about the chaotic, crazy days of parenthood!

Mary Ann

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