

# Adjusting to the First Weeks of School



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In California, school now begins in mid-August through the beginning of September catching many of us by surprise. All of a sudden, it is necessary to mobilize our children and get them out the door early with their lunches, homework, backpacks and freshly brushed hair. How can we best smooth this transition?

The prospect of a fresh start to the school year is marketed through back to school shopping for new outfits, school supplies and backpacks. The prospect of reconnecting with friends, sharing summer experiences and finding the new classroom are also helpful. How can we best sustain this energy and enthusiasm beyond the first day?

## Learn the Classroom Rules

One of my sons had a sixth grade teacher whose mission

that first week was to hit the ground running in terms of organization and parental involvement. Each day my son brought home a checklist for us to review, initial and then sign for him to bring to school the next morning. My son earned points for having all of his homework completed, his notebook organized etc. He lost points for loose papers, and notably the absence of a make or break parental signature page. At the end of the week, if he was successful in attaining the required number of points, my son would participate in the class party. The substance of the party varied and could include free time, a class outing or watching an educational video.

On the other hand, those students who did not meet the required point minimum, would have to stay after school, miss lunch and most importantly go to another room during the reward time. This regime was harsh. Typically, the same students continuously missed out. From my educator's perspective, they often had learning disabilities such as attention deficit or executive functioning challenges. Yet in our own household this regime shaped a renewed commitment to organization.

## Get Organized the Night Before

Before going to sleep, under my watchful eye, my son packed his backpack according to his check sheet specifications. He placed it next to the exit door, which we could not possibly avoid without tripping over it. The required parental signature document was taped on the front door next to the doorknob, for reference early the next morning. The ensuing day's outfit

including shoes and socks were selected and laid out the night before. His lunch was prepared and labeled with his name and placed at the front of the shelf eye level in the refrigerator. We didn't dare forget the lunch, as we were strongly discouraged from bringing it up to school if it were left behind.

## Support the Teacher

This entire regime was an anathema to our somewhat chaotic style of parenting. It seemed both harsh and inflexible. Each morning, I found that my son was positioning at the starting line and sprinting to the car. Yet he learned the following valuable lessons:

Figure out the new teacher's system.

Like it or not, follow these instructions as the teacher is in charge.

As much as possible, plan ahead and assemble the necessary items in advance.

No matter what, bring the freshly minted parental signature sheet every day.

With my heartfelt wishes for a smooth start to the school year,

Karen

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