

# Managing School Year Stress



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During the first weeks of each semester, children will come home daily with many needs, stories of exciting adventures, and frustrating challenges that must be resolved. Parents typically feel overwhelmed with the many school supplies needed for each classroom. Added paperwork must be completed for classroom teachers. Children must also adjust their personal schedules to meet individual classroom schedules.

## Managing Stress

We can model effective stress management behavior by taking a deep breath, reflecting, and choosing our words carefully as life becomes demanding. Our family will be happier during the afterschool routines if we are calm and respectful. Most family members need a break when they first arrive home from work and afterschool activities. The kids want to play or watch television. The parents want to change into their cozy clothes and

relax. Younger children demand hugs and quality time with their parents. Some families preplan their dinners each week and eat leftovers every other day to simplify and support a relaxed evening. Other families make simple meals on alternate nights and purchase prepared food at the grocery store. Whatever the solution for dinner preparation, it is important to strive for a relaxed evening.

## Homework Demands

Homework demands also require that families consider the best time for individual children to complete their assignments. Some families love to get up early, eat breakfast, and review spelling and math facts in the morning. Some children learn best after playing outside and eating a nutritious snack. Most middle school and high school students prefer working on homework after dinner. Parents must be flexible when having their children select the best time for their individualized learning needs.

## Time Management

As the demands of the school year increase, your children may tire earlier and may need guidance on how to manage their schedules. Some children love to binge watch television while others need lots of time outside or playing on the computer. Many are social and want more playdates with friends. When helping our children plan their days, it is important to allow sufficient time for rest, eating, relaxation, homework, and socialization by:

Checking-in with your children daily

Asking your children to reflect on daily successes and challenges

Brainstorming strategies for overcoming challenges

Checking-in with the teacher when your child has unresolved concerns

Securing added support when necessary

Helping children lay out clothes and school items each evening

Having children relax before bedtime by discussing the day and reading stories together

Ensuring that children have a regular bedtime for sufficient sleep

Using alarm clocks to help children wake-up on time each morning

Helping children develop personal grooming skills

Providing a healthy breakfast each morning and packing a nutritional lunch

Planning afterschool activities so the children can relax, enjoy outside play, eat nutritional snacks, and complete homework

Limiting screen time and encouraging more outside play

Organizing playdates and activities with school friends

Scheduling homework time so that children can independently work on assignments

Making a plan to help children complete more challenging homework assignments when rested

Coordinating children's need for homework support with teachers

Hosting homework and project study groups in your home

# Winter Challenges

During the winter months, you may find that you are tired and your kids are becoming more depleted at the end of the school day. You can add these strategies when responding to increased stresses:

Program the alarm clocks to play happy, meditative, or invigorating music each morning.

Teach children basic yoga deep breathing strategies and morning stretches.

Encourage your family to sing songs to popular show tunes or when listening to a favorite radio station when driving to school.

Create art projects when listening to music to inspire creativity.

Relish school days.

Model a healthy outlook during the week to help your children adapt to change and prepare for new challenges.

Take time for yourself to exercise, play, rest, eat nutritional meals, and enjoy your family.

Simplify dinners to ensure a relaxing evening for all and make leftover dinners for alternate nights.

Get help when needed.

Use support networks to simplify your days.

Provide your children with loving, stimulating, and nurturing care.

Use humor to diffuse stressful situations.

As you review the effective strategies for managing your daily life, you may find that you need additional help. Children can thrive when childcare is shared with

extended family members, neighbors, and afterschool friends. A child friendly schedule for working parents requires flexibility and creativity. Parents can use networks to simplify daily life and provide added time for loving, stimulating, and nurturing their children.

When childcare and carpool schedules meet your needs, the household functions more smoothly. Alternative plans should also be identified to account for sickness, changed schedules, and childcare adjustments. This stage in your family's growth must be met with humor, adaptability, and love. Your children will grow up quickly. You will soon be laughing about the chaotic, crazy days of parenthood.

## Sample Case Study

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### *Case Study of a Single Mom's Need for Added Help*

Rosa is a single mom who works full time and has three school-age children living at home. Her youngest daughter is in elementary school. The son is a middle school student and her elder daughter is a senior in high school. Rosa finds that she does not have enough time to support her own personal growth needs, the children's afterschool activities, homework support, and the overall supervision of the family. After discussing these challenges with her friend, Rosa created a reflection worksheet to prioritize and organize her daily schedule. She continues to adjust the schedule weekly as the needs of her family change regularly with new afterschool activities and work demands.

The sample worksheet below highlights how Rosa is managing her weekly schedule by considering her personal needs, the needs of her family, and how she will use others to support her scheduling challenges.

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Rosa's Weekly Schedule for the Week of January 15

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List 5 strategies for reduced stress:

1. I will cook dinner on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.
2. My middle school child will prepare leftover dinners on Tuesday and Thursday.
3. My high school child will plan and cook the Saturday meal.
4. We will participate in our church's potluck dinner on Sunday with a purchased dessert.
5. Grandma will pick up and care for the kids on Tuesday and Thursday.
6. Julie, my neighbor, will pick up and care for the kids on Monday.
7. I will pick up and watch kids on Wednesday and Friday.

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What will I do to care for myself?

1. I will take a walk with my family on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.
2. I will meet my friend for coffee after work on Monday evening.
3. We will play together as a family on Sunday.

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What will I do to care for my family?

1. I will follow-up each night on homework and school needs.
2. I will relax with each child before bedtime.
3. We will have breakfast together each school day morning.

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What changes do I need to make on next week's schedule?

1. I need to change this schedule next week because there are two nighttime activities at the schools.
2. My high school senior daughter needs added help on her senior project due at the end of the month. I must schedule a day to take her to a college library for research.
3. My middle school child must participate in a school sponsored community service event. I will have Grandma attend the event with him next Tuesday.

Although the proposed worksheet may seem ambitious, it can help you plan for the many demands of your thriving family while you maintain a sense of calm and balance in your daily life.