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JAN 2013 | BY MELANIE KALMAR | COMMENTS

Create a Stress-Free Morning Routine

If getting the kids off to school each day leaves you feeling like you just ran a marathon, chances are your children feel the same way.

Unfortunately, a hectic morning sets the tone for the day and interferes with learning.

Take advice from the experts and establish a routine that gives your child time to wash up, get dressed and eat breakfast before heading to school. Everything else, from packing lunches, picking out clothes and readying backpacks, can be done at bedtime.



"If kids come to school feeling stressed, it takes them time to be in a more relaxed state, which enhances their ability to learn," says Brooke Thiede and Janet Radziszewski, social workers at Northbrook Junior High. They advise parents to:

- ★ Give children ample time in the morning to get ready for school.
- ★ Eat breakfast as a family. You'll learn what's on their mind.
- ★ Monitor your own stress. Be calm so they're calm.

Mondays are tough days for kids, because they have to resume their routines.

To make the transition easier, Thiede and Radziszewski recommend sleeping late on Saturdays and picking up the routine again on Sundays.

Mornings are much more relaxed when the three biggest time consumers—clothes, lunches and backpacks—are taken care of the night before, says Amy Trager, president of the Chicago Chapter of the [National Association of Professional Organizers](#).

Clothes

Keep up on laundry and let children put it away, Trager says. Then they'll know where to find it.

- ★ Base clothing on the weather report.
- ★ Allow children to select tops and bottoms ahead of time.
- ★ Hang outfits on a doorknob or place in hanging shelves labeled Monday through Friday.

Lunches

- ★ Stock your refrigerator and pantry with kid-friendly food.
- ★ Keep clean, re-usable containers on hand.
- ★ Post school regulations about food allergies and a running grocery list on your pantry door. Kids see what's dwindling and remind you to replace it.
- ★ Make lunches in the evening. (kids can do this themselves) then store in the refrigerator so kids can grab and go.

Backpack

- ★ Place a vertical magazine holder (one per child) in the kitchen for kids to organize their homework and permission slips.
- ★ Do a nightly backpack check.
- ★ Leave backpacks by the front door.

If clothes, lunches and backpacks are ready the night before, you'll save about 30 minutes in the morning, Trager says. By high school, the routine becomes automatic and they won't need your help anymore. Nice to think that instead of sprinting around the house trying to find the missing homework assignment, you might get to start your morning running with a friend, or even just having an uninterrupted cup of coffee.

Michelle Weiss · Indiana University
 Good advice from NBJH social workers - thanks! I suppose I have to be organized too...
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