

Reducing Back to School Stress

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Parents across Lee's Summit are experiencing a mixture of joy and concern as they send their children off to school. Getting to know new teachers, possibly adjusting to a new school and making changes to the family schedule can make even the most centered parent feel off balance. Consider the following suggestion for making the transition from summer to school more manageable.

Take time to attend back to school events with your student. Meet your student's teacher and other staff. While you are there, inquire about the best way to reach the teacher if you have any questions or concerns. Connecting a face with a name makes future discussions easier and shows the teacher you are invested in your child's school experience.

Establish a morning routine and empower your student to take charge of it. Children in kindergarten can begin learning the essential life skills for getting out the door ON TIME in the morning. To ease stress, have your child prepare lunch, set out clothes and pack homework the night before school. Practice the morning routine on a non-school day. Young children may enjoy having pictures taken of them while going through the steps. You may post these pictures in a convenient place where the child can refer back to them. As your child completes elementary school he/she should be able to manage the routine on his/her own. Be careful not to be their personal alarm clock or back up taxi. Instead allow natural consequences to do the teaching.

Recently a family with two teens was attending a Love and Logic parenting class. They were frustrated because their teens were missing the bus and needing rides to school. The parent's rescuing response was creating problems for them, making them late to work. The teens weren't concerned about making it to the bus on time because they knew mom or dad would take care of the problem. The parents decided it was time for their teens to own the problem. After making suggestions for getting out the door on time, the parents said, "You can ride the bus for free or pay for a ride." After missing the bus one time and paying one week's allowance for a ride to school, the teens quickly learned how to get out the door on time.

Set realistic goals for grades and academic achievement. Each youth is different in their academic abilities. Some are great at math while others excel in English. As adults we shape our careers by our strengths and not our weaknesses. Parents can help students to do their personal best in several ways. 1) Give your student time to decompress when he/she gets home. A healthy snack and some downtime are a great way to recharge batteries. Some youth need physical exercise before they are ready to sit down and concentrate. 2) make sure your student has all the supplies he/she needs to be successful. If this is a financial hardship, visit with your school counselor. 3) Establish WITH your student a specific time and place for homework. Don't say do it NOW. When students have control over homework time they are less resistant to do homework. 4) be available to help with homework, but don't do the work for them. The student should be holding the pencil! 5) Make a big deal about the things your student does well and recognize progress in areas that are more of a struggle. If your student gets 2 out of 10 correct on an assignment don't focus on what they did wrong, instead focus on what they did right. Say, how did you do that? Have you been practicing and studying hard? When parents focus on student's

mistakes, students are less likely to share their work. If you see your child is struggling, contact the teacher and discuss a plan for getting him/ her back on track.

Expose your student to activities. There is an abundance of research that supports the benefits of having students involved in extracurricular activities. However, sometimes parents need to help their student make choices about activities so that he or she is not overscheduled. Youth who are overscheduled experience symptoms of stress, including a compromised immune system and high levels of anxiety. As parents we need to help our children create balance in their lives. Conversely, some youth are perfectly content to come home and relax until the next school day. This is equally as detrimental as youth need exercise and opportunities to explore interests. If your child doesn't seem interested in anything have him/ her chose between a few things you think he/she would enjoy. Encourage your child to complete the experience and offer an opportunity to choose a different activity next time. Lee's Summit Parks and Recreation offers affordable opportunities for youth to explore their interests. As children get older the middle schools and high schools will provide numerous activities for students.

Finally, enjoy the ride! Put your child in a position to succeed but allow him/her to live with natural consequences. Every mistake a youth makes provides a great learning opportunity. Parents who hold their children accountable for their choices and work to guide them to solve their own problems help better prepare them for life. They are more likely to think...How will my next decision affect me?

*Many of the concepts shared in these tips come from Parenting with Love and Logic. If you would like to learn more about this parenting philosophy visit www.LoveandLogic.com. If you would like to learn more about upcoming classes in Lee's Summit visit www.lsCARES.org.