

Transition Back Into the School Routine

Strategies to
help families,
including those with
ADD/ADHD children

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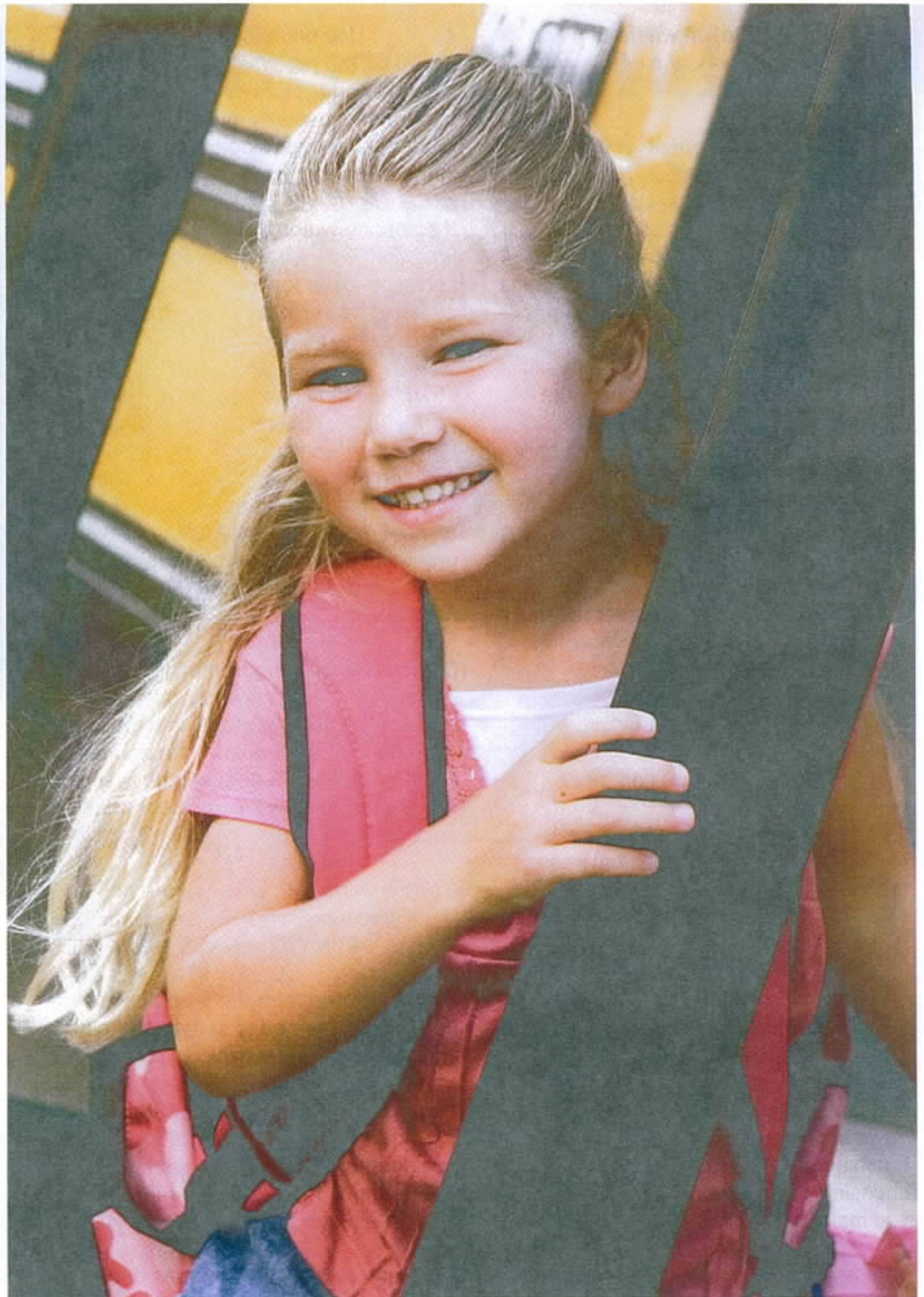
As the school year approaches, transitioning from a summer routine to a structured one can be a perilous task. This is especially difficult if your child has been diagnosed with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Kids need structure, and children with ADHD need it even more. Therefore, beginning to establish a routine prior to the first day of school can ease the transition into an academic setting.

Planning, organizing, and implementing a consistent schedule will be important to help your child transition from the freedom of summer to the regimented school structure. By doing this, your child's emotional and academic adjustment, in addition to their teacher's and peer's initial impressions of them, can be impacted by their ability to successfully transition into the school year.

A new school year can elicit feelings of excitement about seeing old friends and making new ones, disappointment that the summer is over, and anxiety about the unknown.

While change may be difficult for many people, it is especially disruptive for children with ADHD, who typically struggle with transitions. These changes may manifest in behavioral and emotional difficulties as your child enters the school year, which could lead to them getting in trouble or falling behind academically.



The prospect of facing new teachers and classmates, a different environment, altered routines, and possibly a new school can be daunting.

If your child is beginning at a new school or classroom, it may be beneficial to set up a tour, look at the classroom, or take a trial run driving to the school. If possible, setting up play-dates with peers may help your child to reacquire themselves with old friends and make them feel more comfortable entering the year.

Planning and organization are tools parents can use in a preventative manner to anticipate and address areas of difficulty.

As a parent, sitting down and designing a consistent routine will allow the schedule to be well thought out prior to presenting it to your child.

Many people feel more anxious if they are sitting in a filthy and cluttered room versus being in an environment that is clean and organized. This analogy can be applied to any child, including one with ADHD.

Typically, children with ADHD or gifted abilities struggle with organization and if their environment is chaotic and unpredictable, they can feel and act in a similar fashion. Establishing a consistent routine around them, therefore, can help them feel safe and secure.

When planning for your routine, it will be important to take into consideration school and work schedules, afterschool activities, and bed/wake times. According to WebMD:

- Children 3-6 years old require between 10 to 12 hours of sleep, with bedtimes ranging from 7 to 9 pm.
- Children 7-12 years old should be getting between 10 and 11 hours of sleep per day, with bedtimes ranging from 7:30 to 10 pm.
- Children 12-18 years old should be getting between 8 and 9 hours of sleep per day.

A sample daily routine for Johnny, a 9 year old boy typical or with ADHD, could consist of:

Morning Schedule

The goal is to not feel rushed and to allow for all of the morning tasks to be accomplished. If children feel hurried, they may have more trouble finishing things in time which could lead to frustration in parents. If you notice that you or your child is consistently rushed, it may be helpful to get up a few minutes earlier.

6:30 a.m. Wake Johnny up.

6:35 a.m. Johnny completes his morning hygiene routine (go to the bathroom, wash face, get dressed with clothes that were chosen the night before, brush hair). It may be beneficial to post a list or pictures of the tasks he has to accomplish.

6:50 a.m. Breakfast. It is important to start the day off with a healthy breakfast choice. Providing your child with healthy breakfast options is just one of the ways to support concentration and brain health.

7:10 Brush teeth.

7:15 Put on jackets or other articles of clothing, grab backpack (which was organized the night before), and head off to school.

Afternoon Schedule

3:00 Have a healthy snack and relax.

3:30 Complete homework. It will be important for the work area to be clutter-free, without distractions (no TV or radio on), and with books and supplies handy. Provide praise for on-task behavior and positive effort (as opposed to only prais-

ing for correct answers). While doing homework, it may be beneficial to give regular 5 minute breaks to stretch, walk around, and then return to his task.

Helping him with his homework can be appreciated when he asks for it, though allowing him to briefly struggle and solve problems on his own can enhance learning and foster a sense of accomplishment. Also, when providing help, try to ask questions or provide instructions to help your child understand what he is doing rather than solving problems or doing it for him.

4:30 Review homework, provide praise for effort, and have mistakes corrected.

4:45 Organize backpack for next day (may require assistance from you, but similar to homework, should not be completed by parent).

5:00 Relax and engage in a pleasurable activity until dinner (exercise can be beneficial for children with ADHD).

6:00 Dinner with family (continue to provide healthy food choices) around the table without the TV on.

Studies have shown that families who dine together enjoy better communication and have better nutrition, stronger relationships, and children who do better in school and are better adjusted as teenagers.

6:30 Johnny helps clear the table.

6:45 Relax with a book or a game.

Nighttime Schedule

Consistently implementing a schedule prior to bed can help Johnny fall asleep and enjoy a restful night. Limit TV time just prior to bed. The visual stimulation prevent some child from falling asleep.

Studies have shown that a lack of sleep can lead to symptoms similar to ADHD. Making sure that your child is properly rested can improve their attention and concentration the next day.

7:15 Organize backpack and clothes for the next day.

7:30 Take a bath (for hygiene, relaxation, and enjoyment).

8:00 Dry off and put on pajamas, finish other hygiene items.

8:15 Read together.

8:30 Do bedtime ritual (prayer, sweet dreams, etc.), say goodnight, lights out.

Once planned, implementing your routine one week prior to school can allow your child to get used to it. This "trial run" will also allow you to begin to work out any kinks and help your child feel more comfortable with the structure. They will hopefully begin to adjust to the changes in bedtimes and wake-up times.

Once the school year begins, maintaining a daily and weekly routine will be beneficial. Ideally, preserving as much daily or weekly consistency is helpful, though real life events often prevent this from occurring.

Overall, it will be important to not be too rigid or passive. Being a drill sergeant may make your child feel anxious and create tension between them and yourself. In addition, daily life events (such as soccer practice, doctor's visits, school conferences, etc.) may prevent you from completing every task daily. Therefore, if a deviation in the schedule occurs, informing your child of it can help them to prepare for the change. Being too passive and not sticking to the schedule may also negate the benefits of actually having an instituted routine.

The ability to have some fluidity to change and adapt can help create a comfortable environment for you and your child. Finding a middle ground that incorporates structure and consistency while implementing a healthy sense of adaptability and understanding can create a safe and secure environment for your child.

Creating structure around your child will help them feel more comfortable as they prepare for the academic year. Though most children do not look forward to the beginning of school, implementing a consistent routine can help them feel comfortable and confident when making the transition. Generally, routines are not effective because parents give up on them too soon. Therefore, come up with something that works for your family, implement it as consistently as possible, and make it ingrained as a way of life!

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