A Back-to-School Guide for Children With ADHD

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Back-to-School and ADHD

Back-to-school time can be hectic, and for those of us with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD,) or those with children who have ADHD, it can almost cause us to go into panic mode.

However, back-to-school time doesn't have to be stressful. With a little planning, it can be downright easy. Well, maybe not easy, but almost!

Summer Fun

Some families stick to their normal routines during summer break. They feel their children function and feel better when things stay relatively the same. Other families relax things and allow their children to stay up later, sleep in, and don't have as much structure as during the school year. Neither way is wrong.

Families have to do what works best for them, and it may not be what works for someone else.

My daughter and I both have ADHD, and I relax the routines quite a bit during summer vacation. She's in high school, so she's learning to be more self-sufficient. I believe she works hard during the school year and her brain deserves a break!

She also chooses to forego her medication in summer. She says it is nice to let all the thoughts swirl around unchecked and she believes it keeps her from getting too used to the medication so that it keeps working.

Is she scattered, forgetful, and hyper without her medicine? Absolutely. But those things just don't seem like a big deal during summer.

I let her make this decision for herself, and she takes medicine if she is going somewhere important, or doing something that requires sustained attention and quiet. It works for us, but this may not work for others.

What Does This Mean for Back-to-School Time?

If you've relaxed the rules during summer, how do you get ready for school to start again? There are a few things you may want to try:

- Start sending your child to bed a little earlier each night.
- Start getting your child up earlier in the morning.
- Gradually work back into their regular bedtime and wake up time.
- Start taking ADHD medications a couple of weeks before school starts if your child took a break.
- Don't wait until the very last minute to do back to school shopping.
- Have a list of school supplies your child may need.

- Be patient when you do go shopping. Your ADHD child or teen may be excited and get sidetracked with bulging shelves full of items.

Get Organized

Setting up a plan before school starts can be beneficial to both you and your child. Here's how I help keep my daughter organized:

- **Write it down.** Let your child know what their schedule will be like once school starts. Use a big calendar or a white board to write out what each day's schedule will entail, including what is expected after school.
- **Write every holiday, sports practice, extracurricular activity, and school function on your child's calendar.** Add new appointments, practices, meetings, or holidays as soon as you know about them.
- **Make sure your child has a calendar or planner that they can use to write assignments in as well as due dates.** In the first few weeks of school give them a friendly reminder to keep up with writing assignments down.
- **Designate a homework spot.** This is where school items will be maintained and also where your child will put paperwork from school that you need to see.

Starting the New School Year

When the school year begins, there are a few key things will help the day run smoothly:

- Have your child put any homework, papers, books or supplies in their book bag before they go to bed. Write this in their daily calendar or on the white board until it is a habit.
- Set the alarm to ensure your child has enough time to get ready for school without rushing.
- Make sure your child has a healthy breakfast, filling lunch, and a wholesome dinner.
- Have them put book bags, sports equipment, gym clothes, and anything they need to bring to school in a designated location the night before.
- Lay out clothing for the following day before bed.

It Is All About Habits

I will admit that so much of what makes a good transition from summer to school time is just plain old common sense habits. I will also acknowledge that in our household it is challenging for routines to take hold.

So many mornings there is a scramble for the one lost shoe, remembering to pack the math homework, or I left the lunch on the counter.

This is why writing everything down is so important. Some days your mind will just be foggy or feel rushed.

I like to use something we call control journals. Each day of the week has a page in a binder. That page lists everything that must be done that day. A typical day could look something like:

Morning

- Make bed
- Get dressed
- Brush teeth
- Breakfast
- Medicine
- Out the door with a backpack, lunch, gym clothes, soccer uniform, computer, and medications.

After School

- Snack

- Thirty minutes physical activity of choice
- Homework

Evening

- Set table
- Dinner
- Kitchen clean up
- Shower (dirty clothes in hamper)
- Finish any studying and homework
- Free time
- Before bed: Clear any clutter from bathroom countertop, put school items by door, and lay out uniform

Days with after school meetings, sports practice, or other extracurricular activities will change the schedule, of course.

Sometimes there doesn’t seem to be enough hours in the day, and that's where careful planning comes in because you don’t want your child to feel overwhelmed.

With a little effort beforehand, back to school time doesn’t have to be a struggle for you or your child!