

A young woman with long brown hair, wearing a maroon top and blue jeans, is kneeling on a cobblestone path. She has a light blue backpack on her back and is smiling as she adjusts the hair of a young girl standing in front of her. The girl has long brown hair and is wearing a light blue sleeveless top and denim shorts. The background shows a blurred outdoor setting with a building and trees.

**BACK TO  
SCHOOL**

# Re-establish Your Routines

If your kids are like many others, they have slipped into summertime habits that may need to be broken as the school time nears — going to bed later, sleeping later and watching more TV, to name a few.

For parents, that means getting a little more strict in these areas a couple weeks ahead of the first school bell. The sooner you start preparing your child for his new schedule, the smoother the transition will be for everyone involved.

## BEDTIME & WAKE-UP TIME

Wake-up time and bedtime are interrelated. The longer your child stays up at night, the longer he likely will sleep in. That's why trying to get back on schedule should start with the evenings.

Talk with your child, especially if he is still relatively new to the school experience, about the benefits of school routines and how proper rest can lead to better grades and positive attitudes about school.

For younger children, make sure you pick back up on the in-school habits that may have been broken during the summer, such as pre-bed reading and no TV time. Encouraging your child to play quiet games or have conversations with you both at night and in the mornings can keep your child focused and energized for school.

## HOMEWORK

When is the best time for homework? Right after



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school? Right before bedtime?

Many experts say neither, suggesting you give your child ample time to wind down at both of these times. Help your child by setting a deadline to have homework done before dinnertime.

That way she can focus on clearing her mind and getting mentally prepared for the next day after she eats. This deadline also should give her a couple of hours after school to catch you up on her day or hang out with friends.

## FREEZE DINNERS

Students aren't the only ones who will be a bit thrown off come school time. Parents also can help achieve a smooth transition by preparing dinners ahead of time.

Use a chunk of your week-

end to prepare casseroles or soups that can be easily reheated for meal options during the week.

This strategy will be especially useful during the first few weeks of school, when tensions are higher and your new schedule seems tough to keep.

# School Bus Safety

Nothing says school is back in session like seeing the bright yellow buses out and about in your town.

The American School Bus Council estimates that 480,000 buses provide transportation for children every school year. In the most recent study of its kind, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported 1,236 fatal school transportation-related crashes from 2001 to 2010.

These numbers serve as reminders to stay safe at bus stops and on the roadways this school year.

## SAFETY TIPS

The National Safety Council recommends students and parents follow the following precautions when heading out for the bus stop:

- Children should always board and exit the bus at locations that provide safe access to the bus or to the school building;
- Remind your child to wait for the bus to completely stop before approaching it from the curb;
- Make sure your child walks where she can see the bus driver;
- If your child's school bus has lap or shoulder seat belts, make sure your child uses one at all times.

## SHARE THE ROAD

Remember that school buses stop at all railroad tracks. They do this for the safety of your children, so give them the space to do so.

Also, when you see a school bus approaching you from the opposite lane, be on the lookout for flashing lights and extending stop sign, which



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mean the bus is slowing for a student drop-off. Be sure to come to a complete stop in your lane and don't hit the gas until the bus has disengaged the stop sign and turned off the flashing lights.

## BULLYING BEHAVIOR

The school bus is a prime spot for bullying because of the limited view the driver has of all the passengers. Here are some signs of bullying, from the U.S. Department of Health

and Human Services and what the department recommends doing about them.

## SIGNS TO LOOK FOR

- Unexplained injuries;
- Changes in eating habits;
- Frequent nightmares;
- Frequent stomach aches or headaches; and
- Declining grades or interest in school.

## ACTIONS TO TAKE

- Encourage open, honest discussions with your child about the subject;
- Set a meeting with your child's teacher or principal;
- Offer your child actions to take that are an alternative to fighting or verbal abuse;
- Give your child positive and affectionate attention; and
- Keep a close eye out for injuries or worsening attitudes toward school.

# After School Care

**F**or working parents, finding care for children after school can be a bit of a juggling act. It also can be a hit to the wallet.

After-school programs and professional babysitters each have their advantages, so be sure to do your research before settling on one for your child.

## AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Look for staff familiarity first when you're deciding on whether or not to use an after-school program. These may be offered either in your child's school or at a local community college. Either way, it's important that you have a comfort level for the staff members who will be teaching and caring for your children.

Some of the best characteristics of an after-school specialist are energy and enthusiasm, as your student will be coming off a long day of school and could be harder to keep entertained.

Some programs will offer homework clubs that help your child get caught up on his lessons and assignments.

These features can be helpful for busy parents who work hard to pull off dinner, homework and baths after work.

## FINDING THE RIGHT BABYSITTER

If you're children aren't old



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enough to stay by themselves yet, you may be looking into babysitting services to help bridge the gap between the time school lets out and the time you get off of work.

The good news is, you will probably be able to find a good deal compared to paying for an all-day service. The bad news is it can be difficult to find a center or professional offering such abbrevi-

ated hours.

When you do, it's important to check a few things before entrusting them with your children.

- **Check References:** This is an absolute must, as any professional babysitter should be ready to hand over a list of positive references. Call on each one to make sure you're hiring the right person for your needs and also for the

personality types of your children.

- **Ask the Right Questions:** When you call on these references, make sure you're asking relevant questions, like "does the sitter show patience when handling kids," "would you use him or her again if you had to hire a babysitter" and "what are some of the sitter's weaknesses, if any."

- **The Comfort Level:** Following your gut can be your greatest determining factor in you decision to choose one babysitter over another.

You know best what type of discipline style or house setup will benefit your child the most. Trust your judgment and try to consider all aspects of your decision before you make it.

# More Fruits and Vegetables

**W**hat your child eats and drinks for snacks can either propel them or hold them back, especially in terms of school performance.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that the majority of snacks served to students should be fruits and vegetables, since most kids do not eat the recommended amount of five to 13 servings per day.

Fruits and vegetables increase the amount of vitamins A and C and fiber in your child's diet and are less costly than junk food.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the average cost of a serving of fruit or vegetable (all types — fresh, frozen, and canned) is 25 cents per serving. That's a steal of a deal compared to a \$1 candy bar or bag of chips.

## COMMIT EARLY

A snack food diet is hard to break if it has dominated your child's eating habits throughout the summer. You can maintain a healthy variety of fruits and vegetables for snacking during the summer-time in various ways:

- Make fruit a regular evening occurrence. Instead of offering ice cream cones or cake after dinner, provide your kids with a variety of berries.

- Mini yogurt bars can be a charming way of encouraging your kids to eat more fruit. Set up a fruit station on your counter with strawberries, grapes and banana slices. Give



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your child a bowl full of yogurt and let them customize their snack.

- Salad makes for a healthful side item with a summer barbecue or cheeseburger. Opt for a bowl of leafy goodness over French fries and chips.

## TURN BACK THE TRENDS

Choosing plenty of fruits, vegetables and water during snack periods is important to providing good nutrition, supporting lifelong healthy eating

habits, and helping prevent heart disease, cancer and obesity.

Just as important is cutting back on the consumption of other foods found to be harmful if depended upon as too large a portion of a child's normal diet.

University of Illinois researchers reported this year that pizza is the second-leading source of calories in America's children, trailing only desserts. The study found that pizza consumption was associated with higher intake of calories, saturated fat and sodium.

# Extracurricular Activities

There is a fine line between too much and not enough extracurricular activities for your child. Once you find the right balance, the positives are overwhelming.

Indicators of successful participation in school extracurricular activities include consistent attendance, academic achievement and aspirations for continuing education beyond high school, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

## TAKE IT EASY

Too much scheduled time can be stressful, especially for young children. Consider your child's age and your family's schedule when signing up your kids for activities.

Quantity does not beat out quality, so make sure you're putting your kids in the music, sports and art functions in which they show the most interest.

If you have multiple children, you know the challenge associated with managing overlapping schedules or varying locations. All of this should be factored into your decisions.

You can overcome some of these issues by selecting activities where you have someone with whom you can carpool.

If there are after-school activities available that take place mostly at the school, those also can be great activ-



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ities if you're looking to minimize driving.

Most importantly, remember that the main point of your children being involved in extra activities is that they have fun. Putting too much pressure on them — or yourself — can turn what is supposed to be an enjoyable experience into a stressful hassle.

## ATHLETICS

Sports are popular extracurricular activities because they build leadership qualities and teamwork skills. Even individual sports such as golf, tennis or ice skating can develop mental toughness and a love for competition.

Many sports can be enjoyed outside of school during the

summertime to help prepare your student for a strong in-school athletic experience. Here is a list of popular sports, some of which may not be available in your area.

### Spring & Summer Sports

Baseball  
Softball  
Fishing  
Golf

Tennis  
Surfing  
Biking

### Fall & Winter Sports

Basketball  
Football  
Volleyball  
Hockey  
Skiing  
Snowboarding  
Ice Skating

# Organize Your Home

**I**t may sound silly, but your home's layout can actually be the difference between a smooth school day and a rough one.

Think about the logistics required to pull off breakfast, bathroom time and homework. A house with a smaller kitchen, only one bathroom and no designated spot for studying can lead to challenges both before and after school.

Get started now on equipping your home with the right tools to make this the smoothest school year ever.

## THE HOMEWORK SPOT

Do you have a family room or a quiet area of your home? You can designate this as a study area for your younger children. Older children can have the option of studying in their room, if they've proven their ability to maintain good grades and on-time homework completion.

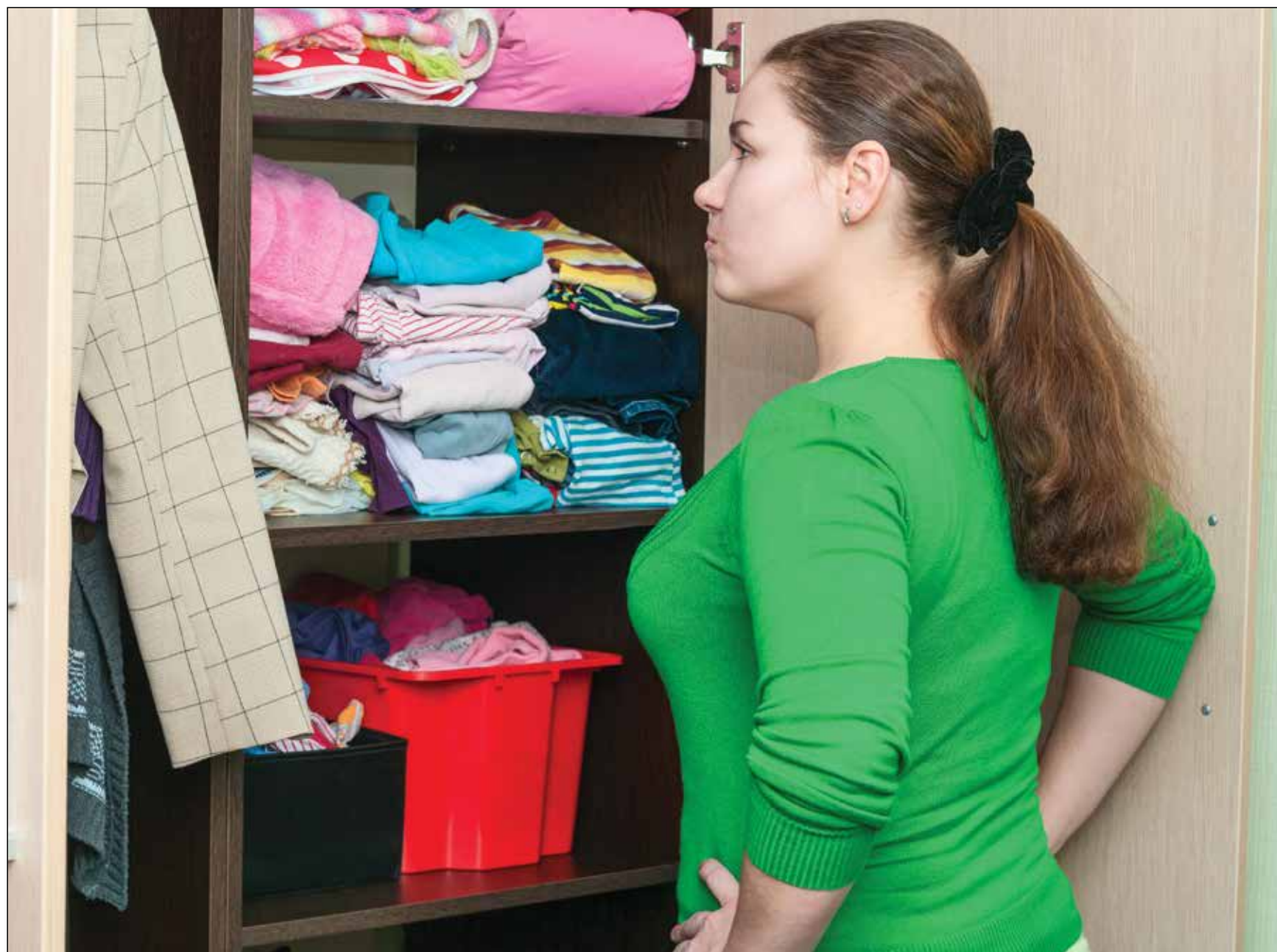
Having a dedicated spot for homework can help you children stay in a nice routine for finishing it. Choose a well-lit spot away from distractions such as TV, radios and even phones, for an optimal learning environment.

## THE COAT SPOT

Nothing can drive an organizational mother mad like a coat or laundry room in disarray. Don't allow scattered shoes, backpacks and lunchboxes to simply land where they may.

Overhaul your laundry room to include a bench with multiple cubbies underneath for shoes, and hooks above it for jackets, backpacks and umbrellas.

You can find easy online building blueprints that you can follow with a few pieces of lumber and some simple tools. You'll have an extremely orga-



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nized laundry room before you know it.

## OVERCOME MORNING MADNESS

Add sleepy kids and a deadline-driven environment and you've got the

ingredients for a hectic morning. Nothing says "good morning" like stress and chaos.

Surely you'd like to send your kids off to school in a calm, collected manner. You just may not be sure how to do it.

The key is in the planning. Load up your evenings with preparation-type

responsibilities, such as packing lunches, gathering lunch money, signing permission slips, ironing clothes and writing yourself a to-do list. By the time 7 a.m. comes around, you'll be sipping your coffee in peace while your children calmly wait for their school day to get started.

# Smart Shopping Tips

**G**o shopping early. Make a list. Go to the store prepared. You already know those back-to-school shopping tips, right?

Here is a list of smart strategies that will help you save money while also making your kids happy with their updated wardrobes.

## TAKE INVENTORY

Treat your child's closet like the stockroom at a major retailer.

- Grab a pencil and notebook, and make a complete list of all school-quality clothes your child possesses. Maybe some of her summer clothes will still work for the fall before the weather turns.

- Assess the list and make a new one of items needed.

- Go over your updated list with your child and welcome feedback on certain styles and types of clothing he or she would like to see in their school selections.

- Take your child shopping with you to help make tough decisions on which items to sacrifice when the budget starts running out. This will teach personal discipline and financial responsibility — two invaluable traits for any age.

## CHECK THE RULES

Schools have gotten more strict with wardrobe rules over the years. And with standards varying across states, districts and schools, it's always a good idea to have a handle on what



and dry. According to a 2014 CNN report, a 5-year-old student in the Oklahoma City public school district was told to turn his University of Michigan T-shirt inside-out because it violated school rules.

The dress code only allows college shirts from Oklahoma institutions in an effort to deter gang activity. Even if you don't necessarily agree with them, policies like this can be adhered to with just a little bit of research on your part.

## TRUST YOUR TEEN

For high school students in need of new school clothes, you can enlist their help to make the shopping experience a bit easier on you.

Your teen may even ask if he or she can go shopping alone this year or with a group of friends. Set clear standards if you choose to allow this. Have your teen build a detailed list of wants and needs, and talk them through the importance of staying under or on budget.

You can even keep the majority of the budget yourself and have your teen pick out a few T-shirts or some tennis shoes. Any shopping power you hand over can help teach your teen the importance of choosing quality, affordable items.

your student can and can't wear.

There are certain articles of clothing that should be a given.

Student appearance can be regulated if it is vulgar, indecent, obscene, insulting or if it carries message that encour-

ages inappropriate behavior, the Education Commission of the States states.

But this rule isn't always cut