Getting Ready For Back To School

School will be back in session soon – what does that mean to you? For some people it's finishing shopping for supplies, gearing up for PTA meetings, and artwork taped to the refrigerator. For others it's the beginning of a constant struggle to stay on top of homework, extracurricular activities, and the household chores. How on earth do you make the transition without everyone in the family feeling the stress?

Set Up a Family Calendar

With all that's going on, there is really only one way to avoid scheduling conflicts and last minute scrambles – and that is to set up a "family calendar." Hang a large wall calendar in a high-traffic area of the house (kitchen seems to work well, because everyone goes in there daily). Label each family member's activities in a different color (Suzy in blue, Mom in green, Dad in red, etc.) for easy recognition. Then take a second to record every single upcoming activity for each person in the family – meetings, social engagements, sporting events, doctor appointments, daily chores, you name it. Every time someone brings home an invitation to a party, permission slip for a field trip or request to bring cupcakes for the class, write it down. Every time the school sends out a calendar of upcoming days off, transfer it to the family calendar. When your child's piano teacher asks if you can switch from Tuesday to Wednesday because she'll be out of town, change the calendar. Get in the habit of putting EVERYTHING related to your family's schedule in one place.

Prepare the Night Before

How much of your AM stress is caused by rushing around at the last minute taking care of routine chores? Getting ready in the morning is much easier if you start working on it the night before. What must happen for your kids to get out of the door on time? How much of it can be done in advance? Have your children spend 15 minutes before they go to bed packing everything they need for school into their book bags. Ask your kids to pick out the clothes they plan to wear and lay them out on a chair. Make everyone's lunches and store them in the refrigerator overnight.

Organizing the School Supplies

Setting up a "homework center" will not only keep all those school supplies from taking over your living spaces, but also guarantee that your child has everything he needs to complete any assignment - right at his fingertips. This can either be a stationary organizing system near where your child studies, or even a portable organizer that can be taken from place to place. Set up either a drawer or container (labeled, of course) for each type of supply – writing utensils, art supplies, paper, report folders, and miscellaneous equipment (like scissors, rulers, and protractors and whatever your child uses in his classes). A freestanding drawer system or rolling cart is a great option for lots of little loose items – and stacking trays work well when storing extra paper and notebooks.

Staying On Top Of the Paper Flood

One of the most effective ways to stay on top of school papers is to stem the tide before it even starts! Set up a plastic tub with a lid for the new school year labeled "art/school papers." Each time your child brings home a drawing, A+ report or other item that you want to save, put it in the box (instead of piled all over the desk or on the floor). Then, at the end of the school year, you can pick your favorites to include in a scrap book.

Back to school doesn't have to be a time of craziness – it will go a lot smoother with a little advance preparation and some good organizing techniques. You actually have a wonderful opportunity to help your kids start building the skills they will need to succeed in life as adults – take advantage of it!