

Back To School Boosters



Each year as Labor Day approaches millions of students head to school, some for the first time, others approaching their senior year or college. For many parents (and kids!) the beginning of the school year feels more like New Year's Day than January 1st does. With a fresh start and a return to routines long forgotten during lazy summer days it can be just what's needed to get back on track. But what if the anticipation of backpacks overflowing with papers and projects that find their way to piles covering your counter space fills you with a sense of dread? No worries – it's never too late to institute new habits! Here are a couple easy tips to keep you, and the kids, on track and start the school year off on the right foot.

A Place for Everything; Everything in Its Place

A familiar quote from one of our Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin, in the 1700's, who knew exactly where to find his kite and string in the darkness of a storm and went on to discover electricity. He was on to an important principle still relevant today! Having a designated place for book bags, school papers, lunch boxes, jackets, etc makes them easy to put away (for kids and parents alike), and easy to find in the morning. Not only that, it teaches and reinforces a skill your student will find useful their entire life.

And parents, can't find your keys/purse/coffee mug every morning? Designate a home for all those items and you'll be able to put them away AND find them. Voila! The whole family is off to a stress free start to their day as well as you being an excellent role model for the kids!

Do the "ASK"

Blackduck, MN 3rd grade teacher Lisa Ogden says one of the best indicators for a successful school year is parents who ask their student about school papers to be reviewed or returned. Keeping lines of communication open between parent, teacher and student is also essential. I like to think of it as a communication triangle, instead of a straight line. Each person involved can talk directly to the others without always using the student as a go between. Utilize email, voice mail, texting (if your teacher is open to that) and personal visits.

To open up communication with your student, practice the "ASK":

Avoid waiting until morning to review papers – the night before is less harried. Applying the "place for everything and



everything in its place” tip will help your student know where to put their papers upon returning home from school so that you will see them. Shifting the responsibility of putting items to be reviewed where they belong to the student sets them up for a life time of knowing where their things are and staying on top of deadlines. It also saves everyone from last minute “I didn’t know you needed that today!” frustrations!

Stay engaged – giving your full attention for even a few minutes lets your student know that you care about them and want them to succeed. This isn’t a time for multi tasking, but for giving the student your quality time. Consider it an investment in your student knowing how important their day to day activities are to you.

It also reinforces the importance of the student putting the papers where they belong so that you can devote your attention to the actions the papers require vs. the frustration of tracking them down and then taking action.

Keep track – This can seem like yet another thing in our ever expanding “to do” list. However, it can be as simple as checking in during Wednesday’s ASK to see if they are prepared for their weekly Friday spelling test. Using a recurring pop up reminder on your calendar, whether paper or electronic, can make this step quite easy. Using your (or the student’s) calendar to break down bigger projects into smaller steps with deadlines allows the student see the project as less overwhelming and gives you a planned opportunity to check in on their progress.

Read the Handbook

I know, I know – who has time? Investing a few minutes at the beginning of the school year to read thru (or even skim!) the student handbook can prevent misunderstandings and potentially frantic phone calls to the school. This is especially true for first time students and when they switch to a new school (i.e. going from elementary to middle or high school). Handbooks are carefully crafted by the school administration to answer common questions that come up during the school year, as well as standard procedures for absences, lunch money, bus routes, etc. They also contain important contact information (phone numbers with extensions, email addresses, etc) that can be handy to have at your finger tips. Many schools have their handbooks online, and for parents that receive a hard copy I recommend filing them along with other school reference papers. Just be sure when the following years’ handbook comes you recycle the previous one!

Each of these tips can be adapted to fit your lifestyle, your student’s needs, and your family dynamics. They work with young children, teens, and adults! There is an old saying that the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago, the second best time is today – it’s never too late to start a positive new habit. Modeling organizing skills and behaviors reinforces them and prepares our students for a successful school career, as well as giving them tools to manage the complexities of adulthood.

Tammy Schotzko

[Watch or listen to Tammy's podcast](#) on preparing first-time students and parents for school.

Certified Professional Organizer Tammy Schotzko works with clients of all ages to tame their clutter and create calm from chaos. She specializes in Hoarding and Chronic Disorganization, but deals with everything from digital files to garages run awry! Her passion for helping people reclaim their space shines thru in her presentations and client sessions. Tammy was recently named "2014 Entrepreneur of the Year" by the Bemidji Chamber of Commerce. Learn more about We Love Messes and Tammy by visiting www.welovemesses.com.

