

# Before the bell

Preparation is key for a happy first day of school: 5 tips to get your family ready for the new year.

BY RAVEN SNOOK

**1 Discuss any changes in advance** Is your kid starting middle or high school, or is it her first year using a locker, taking the bus, or schlepping a laptop? Discuss these new challenges, listen to any concerns your kids have, and strategize. Buy a lock and have her practice opening it (and keep a copy of the combination at home). Talk about the transition to a new school, and find out whether you can take an advance tour of the institution. Show her where the bus stop is. Pick out a sturdy bag for the laptop and reiterate that even though she can play games on this computer, it's not a toy and you expect it to make it through the school year—at the very least!

**2 Buy supplies early and get more than you need** Most schools don't distribute a list of necessary supplies until the first day, but why wait? Buying early, say the beginning of August, means you'll avoid the inevitable long lines and price hikes. "Last summer, I bought notebooks and folders in every color," says Sharon Lowenheim of Organizing Goddess, Inc. "Whatever my kid didn't need, I brought back." Staples even lets customers return items purchased online to a physical store, so you don't have to deal with shipping hassles.

**3 Sketch out a routine** Make it as detailed as possible. Who showers first? Who prepares breakfast? Who makes sure everyone actually gets up? Put the routine into practice a week before the first day. If it's not working, adjust it. "Be flexible," Come to Order's Kathy Jenkins says. "Sometimes a routine sounds good in theory, but just doesn't work for your family. There's always room for tweaking."

**4 Get organized the night before** Before the children go to bed (early, of course), make sure everything is ready to go. The bag should be packed, the first-day outfit picked out, lunch made, and school forms completed, photocopied (for your records), and sitting by the door. OrganizedStudent.com's Donna Goldberg suggests setting up a file folder for each child so you can start filing important school papers—memos, newsletters, that locker combo—from day one.

**5 Allow extra time** We're not talking 5 minutes. Give your family at least an additional half hour to get up and out the door. You might need this cushion for a few days or even weeks until you get back into the school groove, so adjust that alarm! ■




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