

MAKING THIS SCHOOL YEAR YOUR CHILD'S BEST EVER

When the school year starts, your child will probably return fearing math class, the lunchroom mystery meat and being labeled a geek for wearing clothes that went out of fashion last week. A child starting kindergarten or first grade will also fear isolation, not making friends and being unable to find the restroom.

"Make sure those first-day-of-school blues are avoided," says Melitta Cutright, Ph.D., former communications director for the National PTA and author of "Growing Up Confident: How to Make Your Child's Early Years Learning Years."

Whatever age your child is, you can help alleviate first-day jitters by helping the student plan for a new school year. "You'll reinforce the importance of school and make the worries of a new school year less traumatic," Dr. Cutright says.



But remember: The amount of planning help a student wants differs by education level. An elementary-schooler needs plenty of help, while a middle-schooler expects a bit more freedom. An older student might not want Mom and Dad to make any fuss, but parents should find ways to stay involved because high school presents more choices; from deciding which classes to take to choosing after-school activities.

Here's how you can prepare your child for a new school year:

- ◆ Two weeks before the school year begins again, start getting your child back in the habit of going to bed, rising and eating meals at set times. All youngsters need time to adjust to school schedules after summer activities.
- ◆ Make a special trip to the store to buy school supplies; let the back-to-schooler pick out a backpack or lunch box.
- ◆ Make a side trip to a clothing store and buy your child a new outfit for the first day.
- ◆ On a calendar, start counting down the days till school begins.
- ◆ Plan a special back-to-school dinner with your child's help. Rise early and prepare a favorite breakfast on the first day of school.

Familiarity Helps

It's especially important for a young student to be familiar with new surroundings. Parents often forget how frightening change can be to children. To quell any fears of going to a new school:

- ◆ Drive by the school and point it out to your child.
- ◆ On another day, take the child to the school and walk around. Play on the playground and look in classrooms and the lunchroom.
- ◆ If the child will walk to school, walk the route with him or her at least one morning or afternoon. Walk to the bus stop if the youngster will ride the bus.
- ◆ Go to the school's open house so the youngster can meet the teacher and other students in a relaxed setting. Familiar faces are reassuring on the first day.

Homework Rules

The real work begins when school starts. It's a given that children will always hate doing homework no matter what parents say or do. But these suggestions should help with the battle between study and video games.

- ◆ Establish a nonnegotiable, daily homework time. A child should read or work on a personal project on days no homework is assigned.
- ◆ Establish a quiet place for study. Some children do as well on the living-room floor as they do at a desk in the bedroom.
- ◆ Ask about assignments and whether the child understands them. Help if necessary, but don't do the work.
- ◆ Always show interest in the child's education. Don't ask, "How was school?" You're likely to get little more than "OK." Instead, ask about the day's math lesson or problems on a dreaded test. Know the books being read, the papers being written and the projects being assigned.

"Do all that," Dr. Cutright says, "and you'll make the school experience more enjoyable for you and your child."

A WORD ABOUT SOCIAL NETWORKING

The Internet has significantly changed the way our society connects with one another, does business, and socializes. Today's youth have never known a world without the Internet, which is a piece of information adults must put into context when they think about and compare, generationally, social networking to face-to-face communications. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, more than 93% of both teens (12-17) and young adults (18-29) in the United States use the Internet regularly, and more than 70% use social networking sites. Furthermore, among online teens, 62% use the Internet to get news about current events and politics, 48% use it to make purchases (books, clothing, and music), and 31% use it to get health, dieting, or physical fitness information.



Online social networking presents both opportunities and risks. What follows is a cursory breakdown of both, followed by a series of lesson plans specifically targeting online safety.

ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA:

Social skills

Social networking allows people to keep up with current friends and make new ones. When used in the right way, social media can increase self-esteem and help someone feel less isolated.

Independence and self-expression

Creating your own “home page” allows people to express themselves and discuss their interests. They can join groups and support fan pages, and find out about other people’s interests.

Digital competence

Technology is evolving faster than ever before. As teens and young adults learn to adapt to new technologies (or new applications of existing technologies), they will be better equipped to adapt to future technology.

Educational development

Young adults in secondary and post-secondary education will often use social networking to discuss schoolwork and share discussions about assignments.

Research

Young adults can gather information about topics that are hard to discuss with others, such as drug use and sexual health.

Additional advantages for youth with disabilities

Social networking can open up a new world of communication, integration, and community participation. Young adults can express themselves, including their thoughts and feelings, more easily and without fear of the rejection or stigma they may experience in real life. Research also suggests that these young adults may be more willing to ask for help online than in face-to-face situations. Furthermore, young adults who experience difficulty with social skills can socialize anonymously, and can experiment with different personas and practice initiating and maintaining online friendships. They can also respond to others by taking advantage of having time to review and edit communications before sending it on. Ultimately, this skill may carry over into “real life” and give a sense of new courage to make and maintain friendships in everyday life.

RISKS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING:

Sharing one's personal information with the wrong crowd

Young adults need to be aware that information given out online could also put them at risk of victimization. People looking to do harm could use posted information to identify them or gain their trust. They can also be deceptive by pretending to know a young person.

Encourage young people to privatize their online social networking accounts (such as Facebook and Twitter).

Bullying

Harassment may occur online only (cyberbullying), or it may spill over to offline bullying committed by a person who has located his victim online.

Cyberbullying can cause significant emotional harm resulting in depression, anger, school avoidance, violence, and suicide.

The permanency of online profiles

Once information has been shared on the Internet, it's out there — forever! Retrieving information that others have read and captured is nearly impossible. Inappropriate pictures, captions, and comments could come back to haunt youth as they start applying to colleges or looking for jobs.

Disclosure

People tend to be far bolder and less discretionary with information shared online versus in person. This means there is a greater risk of giving out information including the presence of a disability that, given a second thought, we might not have wanted to disclose.

Additional potential risks for youth with disabilities

Social networking may further isolate those who may already feel isolated or not included, and can ultimately lead to depression and loneliness. Also, young adults with disabilities must make important life decisions regarding disclosure of their disability (if, how, when, and to whom). Unintended disclosure is possible by posting pictures or becoming fans of disability support groups, for example. While this might not be an issue, it makes the “disclosure” discussion even more important. For more information on disability disclosure, see *The 411 on disability disclosure: A workbook for youth with disabilities* (available online at: <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure>) and *Cyber Disclosure for Youth with Disabilities* (available online at: <http://www.ncwdyouth.info/cyber-disclosure>).



The process of empowering youth to make safe and responsible decisions online can be compared to the process by which they may have learned to safely cross the street. First they hold hands with an adult, and then they gain a little more independence and might be watched from afar. Ultimately, they become capable of making safe and responsible decisions on their own.

Educating youth about social networking communities must be grounded in the providing of knowledge, skills, and values so that eventually they can be expected to independently exercise good judgment.

U.S. Department of Labor

BLAST OFF WITH BREAKFAST



You probably know that breakfast is your fuel for the day. Forty years of breakfast-related studies have shown that jump-starting the day with breakfast helps everyone from kids to teens to adults. A healthy breakfast gives you the nutrients you need to perform and feel your best. If you don't eat breakfast, you may stall later in the day. Or, you may be tempted to overeat. Start your day off right and blast off with some healthy breakfast choices.

Why you need to eat breakfast

Here are some important reasons to fit breakfast into your morning:

- It's time to refuel. By the time you wake up, you may have gone without food for 10 to 12 hours. Breakfast is the early morning re-fueling stop for your body, providing a fresh source of energy for your brain and muscles through the foods you eat. Research tells us that breakfast skippers often feel tired, crabby or restless in the morning. On the flip side, those who eat breakfast tend to have more endurance and strength, as well as better concentration and problem-solving ability. Breakfast eating is also associated with better attitudes toward work or school; higher productivity later in the morning; and, better ability to handle tasks that require memory. (Skipping breakfast may make your mood irritable and slow down your reactions.)
- You won't snack later or end up bingeing later in the day, if you eat breakfast. Some people wrongly believe that skipping breakfast offers an effective plan for monitoring weight. But many people who skip breakfast tend to overeat later in the day and gain more weight than those who eat in the morning. If you eat breakfast, you are less likely to snack later in the day.

Healthy choices

Once you've decided to make breakfast part of your day, be sure to pick a healthy one. A healthy breakfast is low in fat, cholesterol and salt. But healthy doesn't have to mean boring. Here are some breakfast ideas that can help keep you energized -- you may even look forward to them.



- Try a whole wheat waffle topped with applesauce, or eat other complex carbohydrates, such as whole-grain breads, cereals or pancakes topped with yogurt and fresh fruit.
- Try a breakfast shake made with juice, fruit or low-fat or nonfat dairy products such as milk and yogurt and a teaspoon of bran.
- Try fresh or canned fruit in its own juice mixed with low-fat yogurt and sprinkled with cereal. You can also try other foods rich in vitamin C, such as citrus fruits and juices, strawberries and cantaloupe.
- Limit how often you eat "traditional" breakfast foods, such as sausages, eggs and grits. When you want a "traditional" breakfast, try turkey sausages and egg substitutes. These can still be high in sodium and fat, so limit these, as well.
- Add nutrition and flavor to cooked cereals--instant or not--like oatmeal, grits, cream of wheat or rice, or couscous by using fruit juice or milk for any or all of the cooking fluid. Another idea is to fortify the cooked cereal with dry milk powder for even more calcium or blend in a little chopped fruit, grated cheese, nuts or dried fruit. You could even top the cereal with any fresh fruit of any kind!
- Eating on the run? Keep quick-to-fix foods on hand: instant breakfast mixes, breakfast cereals, bagels and english muffins, toaster waffles, fresh and canned fruit, yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese, juice and milk. Grab a bran muffin and yogurt topped with berries or a bagel with fruit chutney spread, a side of baby carrots and don't forget the milk. Lean ham on a toasted english muffin, with juice, is another quickie breakfast. Or warm-up those leftovers and add a fruit or vegetable juice. Another thought is to get breakfast ready the night before so you can grab it and run!

If you're short on time, you can eat many of these healthy alternatives on the way to work or school, or when you get there. So start changing your thinking about breakfast. Make it an important part of your day. After all, making the most of the day depends on getting a healthy, energetic start.

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A Stress-Free Back-to-School Season



Whether you're actually going "back to school" or just anticipating the fall, you may feel a crunch during the change of season. If you tend to feel anxious during this time of year because of the upcoming holiday season, the shortened daylight hours, and your family's busy schedules, remind yourself that you don't have to stress! Follow these steps to help carry your carefree summer spirit into the upcoming fall season!

Plan Ahead. What is it that stresses you out about this time of year? If it's the rush to buy back-to-school materials, make a list of what each child needs and create a shopping strategy in advance. If it's the holiday preparation looming over your head, schedule some time to figure out what went well from last year and what could be improved. Reflect on the stressors, then focus on preventing those ahead of time. Waiting until the last minute is sure to stress anyone out!

Share the Tasks. Consider joining a carpool to ease the stress of daily drop-offs and pick-ups. If your morning commute is becoming a drag, try out other options, such as public transportation, biking, or walking. This will not only save time, money, and the environment, but can also help lower your stress and keep you active.

Schedule in some SUN. Be sure to make time to enjoy the weather while it lasts! Spending time in the sun (just 20 minutes per day) can help you get the Vitamin D you need to keep your body feeling happy and healthy.

Find Some "Me" Time. If you're constantly running from activity to activity, it's probably hard to take the time to enjoy what you are doing. Be sure to slow down and savor the moment. You can practice slowing down by reading a book, taking a walk or bath, watching a movie, cooking a nice healthy meal, or talking with a loved one. Remember to take deep breaths and really appreciate the moment you are in. Spending just a few minutes doing any of the above activities can help restore a sense of happiness and peace in your everyday life.



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