
Tips for a Great Start to the School Year

After the long summer vacation, starting school can be an exciting and anxiety-filled time for children and parents alike. Here are 18 excellent tips to start off the school year. The list was adapted from an article in *The Chelmsford Independent*.

1. Children tire more quickly the first weeks of school. Be patient until life settles into a routine. This is especially true for first graders.
2. Recognize that parents and children both need time - even five minutes - to unwind before dinner. Make this part of your family routine.
3. Make sure your children have time to exercise, relax and play each day. A good rule is "outside play after school, before homework".
4. Ask specific questions. Not "How was your day at school," but "What did you like best at school today?" Then LISTEN to what your child has to say.
5. Take time to meet your child's teacher and communicate with him or her throughout the school year. Share any concerns or special situations that might affect your child at school, such as births, deaths or separations in the family.
6. Visit your child's school regularly, even if your child is reluctant to have you there. We urge fathers to visit your child's class and not delegate this task to mothers alone. It is great fun, and being a "helping father" is a wonderful way to observe your child in a totally different environment.
7. Share parenting ideas. You may find new ways to deal with similar concerns.
8. Review your child's homework each day. Talk to your child's teacher if you do not see work coming home regularly.
9. Praise your child for every accomplishment, large or small. This is the most effective reward a child can get and it builds self-esteem and confidence.
10. If your child walks to school, plan and practice a safe route before school begins. Arrange for your child to walk to and from school with a friend.
11. If your child travels to school by car, insist that he or she use a seat belt at all times and ride in the back seat if the car has airbags. This is an important consideration for car pools.
12. Children who ride bikes to school must wear helmets. Ask the school where helmets can be stored safely.

Tips for a Great Start to the School Year (continued)

13. Do not put your child's name on the outside of clothing. This will prevent strangers from calling your child by name.
14. If your child has a house key, remind him or her to keep it out of sight.
15. Help your child memorize his or her full name, address, phone number, and parents' work number.
16. Teach your child about personal safety. He or she should never go with anyone, even someone they know, unless they check with you first.
17. Listen to your children. They need to know that you will always take their concerns seriously.
18. Remember, you and your child's teacher are a team, working together to help your child learn and grow. Never disparage or criticize your child's teacher. If your child complains about the teacher, listen carefully, letting your child know that you are concerned and then discuss the problem privately with the teacher and work out a plan together to solve the problem.