

Making the School Run (Relatively) Stress Free

With the best will in the world, it can be difficult for the morning routine to run smoothly in a busy household. As much as we would all like a relaxed start to the day, more often than not we are running round looking for that missing shoe/PE kit/homework when we should have left the house 5 minutes ago! But there are small changes you can make to minimise the morning dramas and ensure a more pleasant start to the day for everyone.

<p>Keep the bedtime routine going – even as your child gets older. Children continue to need a good amount of sleep, even as they approach the end of their time at primary school, and your child will be much more likely to cooperate in the morning if (s)he has had a good night's sleep. In particular, you should try to restrict screen time in the hour to two hours before bed, as the light emitted by electronic devices can interfere with sleep patterns.</p>	<p>Avoid the temptation to do everything for your child. Obviously this depends on their age and stage of development, but the sooner you can encourage independence the better, especially with things such as dressing, washing, brushing teeth and so on. As your child gets older, encourage him/her to take more responsibility for things such as handing in homework.</p>	<p>Use a cue. Young children can struggle to have a concept of how much time they have left, so setting an alarm to ring when they have a minute left can be a good prompt. Alternatively, you could all count down from 50/20/10 (great for number skills too!) or you could set the target of getting a task done in the time it takes to sing a favourite song, e.g. 'By the time we've sung "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" you need to have put your shoes on!'</p>
<p>Explain the consequences. Rather than yelling, 'Come on or we'll be late!' explain that the child has a choice – hurry up and get ready, or they will be late for school and will get a late mark on the register, and will also miss important learning.</p>	<p>Rehearse getting ready. If your child struggles to do things independently, take some relaxed time, perhaps in the evening or at the weekend, to practise things such as getting dressed.</p>	<p>Use picture cues. If you find yourself repeatedly giving your child instructions, try giving them a series of pictures showing them what they need to do next – get dressed, brush teeth, eat breakfast etc.</p>
<p>Do what you can the night before. Have uniform laid out and ready, book bags and shoes by the door, lunch boxes packed. As your child gets older, encourage independence by getting him/her to do these tasks.</p>	<p>Discuss as a family what would make your morning routine better. Children like to feel they have had a say and been heard, and are more likely to cooperate if some of the ideas were theirs!</p>	<p>Think about when your child is at their best – and when you are too! Some people are larks, some people are owls. If your child is not a morning person, it's probably better to complete tasks such as learning spellings or practising musical instruments in the evening.</p>

And if, despite all this, things go wrong from time to time (which they will!) try to take some time out to breathe deeply, count to ten – whatever makes you feel calmer. This is also a great way of showing your children that there are positive ways to deal with stressful situations