

5 Back-to-School Preparedness Tips

It's that time of year again! If your kids haven't already gone back to school, then they won't be far behind. Making the transition from summer to fall isn't always easy. There are a lot of changes that must be managed. For many children in foster care, some of these transitions may be bigger milestones for them because of the change in living they have already endured. It's important to be sensitive to their adjustment time and to give a little room for emotional responses to so much change in their lives. Here are five back-to-school tips to help you and your kids make the shift as easy as possible.

1. Bedtime

Gradually start getting the children to bed earlier and earlier, so that one week before school starts, they are on their fall schedule. Once school begins, bedtime should be at the same time every night. Weekend times for bed, of course, can still vary a little from the rest of the week. With children coming from hard places, bedtimes may be a foreign concept to them. Working on a routine may need to be more gradual. If they have trouble sleeping, create an atmosphere that may make it a little easier to sleep. Ask if they have a favorite stuffed animal they would like to sleep with or read a book with them before bed so they can begin to adjust to going to bed a certain time. No two children are alike nor are the things they may have experienced. Be flexible with what works best for the children in the home.

2. Homework

If you have youngsters who handle homework on their own (yes, there are children like this), leave them alone or say something like: "You really did a good job last year doing your schoolwork by yourself." With other children, sit them down and discuss how their homework will be handled every day. Good rules of thumb include "same time, same place," and "try to get it all done before dinner." TV is not allowed while doing schoolwork, but many kids do better while listening to music. Some children may need to do homework in a different setting like with a tutor or at the library to help focus their minds a little better. They may even need a toy to fidget with in their hands while they focus on comprehending the work they are doing. If your children continue to struggle, ask the school for assistance and resources.

3. New Schools

If you have a child who is going to a new school, make sure you take them over for a visit. Tour their new classroom and, if possible, meet their new teacher. Even if you can't, try to find at least one friendly person in the school that your child can talk to for even a little bit. Your visit—and that friendly memory—will help to counter some of your child's fears of the unknown. For children from hard places, it's important to them that they are not labeled as soon as they enter a new school. Be sure not to disclose details of their family situation but to show care for making sure they get the support they need at school. As a CASA, visiting at school may be something that happens only when needed once rapport has been built with the child/family and that child feels comfortable with a visit from you at school.

4. School Supplies

Make a fun shopping trip out of buying school supplies. One-on-one shared fun is the best parent-child bonding method in history. That means ONE child plus you go shopping and to lunch, not THREE kids plus you, if possible. Kids cherish being alone with a parent/caregiver, and one on one time shopping for just clothes or shoes will start off the school year letting that child know you cherish adventures with them.

5. Listen and Talk

While you're out getting things for school, or anytime really, be a sympathetic listener. Ask your child how it feels to be going back to school, both what's good about it and what's challenging about it. Then, from time to time, tell your youngsters what it felt like for you to be going back to school at about their age. Don't be scared—be honest! For some children, school may be their safe haven and for others, a place of fear from bullying. Spend a little time opening the doors of communication to talk about times when

they are excited and times when they fear being around others at school. Make sure they know they won't be judged for expressing their feelings.

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