

Summer + Back to School Planning = Less Stress

By Jody Adams
In Its Place



Do you believe it's August already? Don't worry, there's still plenty of time for barbecues, picnics, and vacations before cooler weather sets in. It's also time to start preparing for "back to school." With a little planning, the transition from "pool-time" to "school-time" can be less stressful than you think.

Clothes are one of the biggest "back to school" stressors, particularly if your children do not wear uniforms. Of course kids want all new clothes, and the latest fashions can be quite costly. But before you head to the mall, take an inventory of each child's wardrobe. An ideal time to do this is just after all the laundry has been washed. Go through each piece of clothing from their dressers and closets. As you sort, discard items that are stained, torn, or ripped beyond repair. Put any clothes that they've outgrown or don't wear that are in good condition in a donation pile. Involve your children in the process by having them try on clothes to check for fit. For all the remaining clothes that they do wear, make piles of (and/or hang, if appropriate) all like items, such as t-shirts, socks, short sleeve shirts, etc.

Once you can see what they have, you can determine what each child will need and make a list. Now you're ready to hit the sales at your favorite stores. When you actually do go shopping, try to buy at least one matching pair of shorts or pants for each shirt. Your daughter may love that hip new top, but it's not a bargain if it doesn't match anything.

Figuring out what school supplies to buy can also cause some anxiety. Each child will need different items, depending on age, grade, type and number of classes, school requirements (if any), and personal preference. Notebooks, binders, and folders, oh my. . . where to begin? Some children function better with a binder and loose-leaf paper, while others prefer a separate notebook for each subject, or one large multi-subject notebook for all of their classes. Discuss with each child what works best for taking notes and keeping track of handouts and papers. The more user-friendly the items are, the more likely your children will use them and stay organized.

To further reduce stress, reconsider the function of your entryway, children's rooms, and homework spots. If your front hall has been a dumping ground for your kids' stuff, try putting in height-appropriate hooks for jackets and bookbags, cubbies for shoes and boots, and baskets for hats and gloves and other small items. Providing a designated "landing spot" for your children's things as soon as they walk in the door helps to reduce chaos in your home. If a cluttered desk space or too many distractions caused your

children to have trouble completing assignments last year, clear out and organize the work space in each child's bedroom, or consider creating a "homework zone" where all the kids can study without the television. In either case, make sure there is good task lighting and a surface large enough to comfortably hold their books, notebooks, and/or computer.

So in between enjoying the outdoors and munching on your favorite summer recipes, spend a little time getting ready for the start of school. The summer will be that much more enjoyable knowing that you'll be avoiding the last-minute pressure of "I need a notebook and pens and I forgot. . ." and "Mom, I have nothing to wear."