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FOR FAMILIES

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Morning tips for getting children up and ready

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❖ INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Adapted by Judy McDaniel, communications consultant, from information found on About.com.

Getting children up and ready for the day, whether it be for school, daycare, or even a sport or enrichment activity, is a sure-fire stress builder and typical cause of morning madness. What can parents do to start each day in a positive fashion?

❖ Make the morning routine a way of life.

Parents unwittingly cause morning madness by not instilling that the routine is a family requirement and not an option. A non-negotiable routine must be established, and consequence discussed and determined.

❖ Stagger wake-up times.

If you've got more than one child in the house, and especially if you have a large family, consider staggering wake-up times for greater efficiency. Start with children who need assistance first, or the ones who are real sleepyheads and move at a snail's pace come mornings.

❖ Conquer clothing wars with proper planning.

Clothing, down to clean socks, underwear and shoes, and even matching hair accessories should be laid out each night before bed. Youngsters can play a role in choosing the outfit, but no changes are allowed once their head hits the pillow. And, then stick with it! The only exceptions should be an unknown tear or stain, or surprise change in the weather. This avoids missing socks, unmatched shirt and shoes, and keeps getting dressed a simple step in beginning the day vs. a looming battle.

❖ Determine breakfast choices in advance.

Some parents swear by weekly breakfast menus; others adhere to cereal and fruit. Yet others have their children eat the \$1 breakfast at school each morning. Some daycares offer breakfast; others allow parents to bring in a morning meal. Breakfast is important. Some experts argue that it is the most important meal of the day. Children need a nutritious start each morning, but that start shouldn't put parents in a work bind or make children late for school.

❖ Only do what's really important.

Some parents unwittingly set their children up to fail with their morning routines by taking on unexpected chores and duties, which causes whines and a mad rush to end up on time. Consider creating a checklist of what absolutely must be done each morning, and then forget the rest. If you want your child to make his or her bed every morning, then make that a requirement. However, cleaning the cat box can surely wait until a child gets home after school.

❖ Recognize that the "snatch and go" theory really does work and designate an area for all essentials.

It's just not enough to get dressed and eat. How many times have children missed the bus because they couldn't find their

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homework sheet or didn't have their backpack put together? If you drive your children, then put their organized backpacks in the car the night before. Lunches should also be prepared just before bed and easily grabbed from the fridge the next morning. Jackets should be in a central location. The "snatch and go" theory really does work in the mornings.

Designate an area for all essentials that can eliminate the crazed morning syndrome when you're trying to leave. Shoes, backpacks, car keys, cell phones, purses, etc., should be placed in this area every day, always, so they are always in place and ready for action. Keep a cell phone charger in this area so your phone is charged for the day. Not having to hunt down keys or other last-minute essentials is a time and blood pressure saver, for sure.

❖ Plan an occasional exception morning.

One way to make it easier for children to get up in the mornings is to create an occasional "kids get up...NOT" day as a reward. If it's a school holiday, lazy weekend opportunity, or just about any reason at all, parents can make a special celebration out of the exception. The "not" day also serves to reinforce the lesson that normal mornings have a schedule and expectation; and that occasionally everyone gets a break from the routine.

❖ Instill self responsibility.

Except for the very youngest, children can learn to awaken by an alarm clock and get themselves up without mom or dad hovering and yelling, "Are you up yet?" Let them decide what is the best time for the alarm to go off and get ready on time. If this means Erica doesn't get her hair braided or Sam doesn't get second helpings on cereal, encourage them to set their alarms 15 minutes earlier for future days. Cause and effect is a good lesson to learn.

❖ Model good morning behavior.

And, finally, parents really can help to determine whether their children become morning risers or morning whiners. If parents moan and groan, are always frantic, grumpy and running late themselves, then how can they really expect anything more of their children? Good advice is to get up earlier yourself, start that coffee or do 10 minutes of exercise, and then show that Positive Mental Attitude (PMA) and really mean it when you greet your kids with "Good Morning!"