

Life Tip

11 ‘Back To School’ Parent Tips

It’s time to re-train your child’s brain

Where did the summer go? Fall is just around the corner and “back to school” is on many parent’s minds. The challenge is getting school back on the mind of your “live-in” student. If you want your child to hit the ground running academically this school year, then it’s time to retrain their brain.

Schools around the globe provide a system of routines for maximizing learning that is specific to each student’s age and ability. Unfortunately, these routines have been breached with approximately 90-days of vacation and they need to be re-established prior to the first day of class. Here are 11 tips to help your student establish routines for a successful school year.

1. Re-set sleep patterns. Seven to ten days prior to the first day of school start the process of regular sleep. Wean the student off of going to bed late and sleeping late. Yes...you’ll probably cave to the “Mom, it’s my last weekend before school, why can’t I stay up late?” However, sleep patterns are crucial for reaching peak performance during the first class period and maintaining it until the bell rings to go home. Start this process sooner than later and help maintain it all year. Good luck on this one. Be bold. Be consistent.
2. Re-set eating habits. Once school begins the eating patterns of the student need to be set so that they can maintain a high level of energy throughout the day. The routines of breakfast, snack, lunch, snack and after-school snack prior to homework need to be implemented. In fact, the entire nutrition of the student needs to be well thought out 7-10 days before school begins. Someone other than the student needs to be the chief, family nutritionist.
3. Exercise the brain. Just like NFL conditioning and exhibition games that prepare each football player for the upcoming season, your student needs to warm up and begin to hone the basics of math, reading and writing prior to the school year. To allow your brain to stagnate for three months without reading is a travesty for super-learning and learning itself. Is it too late? It is what it is. But begin now to encourage reading and writing at least 7-10 days prior to the first day of school. If school textbooks for the upcoming year are available, start there with the first several chapters. In addition, math skills can easily erode over the summer. Have your student review the previous year’s math basics before they go to the next level.

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4. Set academic goals. Establishing well-defined goals is one of the hallmarks of a champion. Each student needs these academic goals with corresponding strategies and tactics for reaching them. Set goals for each class and hold your student accountable.

5. Identify priorities. Football games, dances, playing video games, watching television, social media, homework, sports, extracurricular participation and friends are all part of each school year. Does academics top the list of priorities? When is homework to be accomplished? Before dinner? After school? After dinner? When can I watch my favorite TV shows? This 90-minute to 120-minute homework routine needs to be placed in your student's schedule before the school year. Sunday night is a great night to prepare for the upcoming school week. This is a routine they can take into their adult life.

6. Social media. This activity gets its own mention. I believe Smart phones aren't always smart. This device is your student's pipeline to the rest of the world with emphasis on their peer group. Self-discipline and concentration don't always mesh with the cell phone. No cell phone usage during homework. Period. No cell phone usage after certain hours (you decide the nightly cell phone curfew). As a student or guide to a student, you need to know three things about social media. What is my responsibility? What is my authority? And lastly, what will I be held accountable. Monitor this activity. You don't need surprises. Keep abreast of where and when your student goes on the web and with whom they communicate.

7. Risk and reward. This subject needs to be addressed frequently with your student. Every thing they do or don't do has a positive or negative consequence. What is the risk of doing this activity? What is the reward (or consequence) of doing this activity? The risk and reward "talk" needs to be given and repeated often.

8. Ask questions. Tell and yell does NOT work as a form of communication. Many of us have been raised with this form of information delivery. In order to turn your student into a viable and responsible decision-maker, then great questions will eventually produce great answers and ultimately great actions. Asking questions that can easily be answered with a terse and or mumbled yes or no are NOT great questions. Prepare this type of communication and be consistent. "What are your goals for grades and how are you going to accomplish this?"

9. The peer group. Birds of a feather flock together. Interview, research and keep tabs on ALL of your student's friends during the school year. This definitely includes monitoring ALL social media. If you're paying the phone bill, then it's your phone NOT their phone. Your student's "circle of friends" is the main influencer of how they approach homework, speech, dress, music and any other behavior. Police the peer group. Also, meet all parents of your child's friends. This will tell you a lot.

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10. Get ready Mom and Dad. Yes, as parents we need to prepare to assist our live-in students in setting, organizing and managing the best routines for maximum learning. This also pertains to family activities such as dinner, chores, family outings, sibling behavior, and community service. Of course, your student's priority is preparing for their academic year and maintaining good grades. But do NOT forget family. This institution is the fabric of our country and needs constant building and repair. Make your student an integral part of the family. Keep them in the loop of all upcoming activities. Make the family name a brand each family member is proud to showcase in the community.

11. Allow for freedom of choice. Academic champions study with great self-discipline and commitment. They make sacrifices and choices. However, all students need some time to blow off steam and just hangout with friends or do nothing while chilling alone. Allow your student the time in their busy schedule to do this. Just be moderate. Grades first.

As parents we have the sole responsibility, accountability and the authority to oversee the education of our children. We can become best friends with them later in life. For now, we are the guides, mentors and coaches. We must be consistent in this endeavor. Be the coach. Be the teacher. Be the guide. Parent! This verb is NOT always cool, but it will reap dividends.

Pay now or you and your student will pay later.

Good luck Mom and Dad. You are the role models our students, schools, and communities need. Our country's future depends on it.

Have an awesome school year!

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