

practical tips for avoiding back-to-school stress

By Noah Webster Educational Foundation



Table of Contents

Introduction

1 Prepare!

Get stocked up

2

3 Safeguard your child's emotional & mental health



Introduction

It's that time of the year again! After a busy summer, you might be dreading the return-to-school whirlwind—supplies to get, plans to make, schedules to change. Whew!

Or maybe it's your first time sending your child off to school, and you're feeling emotional and overwhelmed.

It's all going to be okay! You have everything you need to make this transition go smoothly. That's why we've compiled a few practical steps here to help you eliminate a lot of the stress that comes with the back-to-school season.

Let's dig in.



1 Prepare!

- **Scheduling**
- **Organization**
- **Checklists**

Scheduling



It's important to get ahead of the game on this one. Take a few minutes to sit down with your calendar or planner and look at the big picture. Scheduling will help you budget your time so you don't always feel like you're behind.

If your kids are older, it's a good idea to go over upcoming schedule changes together so you're all on the same page.

After you've gotten familiar with your new time budget, make a game plan for how you can stay organized and keep your kids on track as you all settle into your new schedule. Here are a few practical steps:

Organization

- **Meal planning and prepping ahead for your family meals**
- **Snack planning for your kids while they're at school**
- **Making sure the laundry is done. (For small kids, maybe lay out their clothes the night before.)**
- **Collaborating with your kids to have their things in order so they can grab and go!**



Checklist

Who doesn't love a good checklist? We all have different personalities, but checklists are universal tools that can help you stay on track when you and your kids are going a hundred different directions everyday.

Check out our example checklist below. You can use a checklist like this to go through your house and see what you have and what you need to pick up or do!

- **Shopping**
 - **Clothes**
 - **Shoes**
 - **Backpacks**
 - **Snacks**
- **Supplies**
 - **Notebooks**
 - **Pencils**
 - **Binders**
 - **Crayons**
 - **Glue**
- **Chores**
 - **Laundry**
 - **Meal prep**





Get stocked up

When kids go back to school, it's likely that they'll need a few new things. (They'll certainly want them!)

Whether it's shoes, a backpack, notebooks, or technology, there's no need to break the bank on *anything*.

Your kids might gripe about hand-me-downs, but it's okay to repurpose supplies and clothes that are still perfectly effective & decent.



Moneycrashers.com has wonderful tips for avoiding financial stress in the back-to-school season.



- 1. Do a Supply Sweep* by rounding up all the supplies you already have. Look in all your craft drawers, closets, basement bins, etc., to see what you already have that is totally usable.**
- 2. Do a Supply Swap* with your friends or neighbors—trade your excess on-hand items for other things they have that you need.**



3. Check thrift shops and consignment stores for supplies, clothes & shoes. Thrifting has become a national fad, and not all thrift stores only carry grandma sweaters that smell like mothballs.



But, if you're skeptical, search for a consignment store near you instead.



Consignment stores have a larger variety of gently used name-brand pieces that your child will feel oh-so-cool in.



Pro tip from Moneycrashers.com:

When you're back-to-school shopping, it's easy to get paranoid about the cost of glue at Target compared to Walmart. We've all been there. But while it's vital to watch prices on small items, you only have so much time and energy.

You're better off using this limited time and energy to save money on bigger-ticket products, especially electronics like computers and tablets. Saving \$300 on your high schooler's new laptop means more to your budget than saving \$5 on your middle schooler's lunch box or 25 cents on your kindergartner's bottle of glitter glue.

Focus on saving money on your most significant expenses first, and let the glue take care of itself.



3

Adjusting to Change:

Safeguarding your child's emotional & mental health

A new school year likely brings change with it. Your child might be nervous about some of the newness. Perhaps you've moved to a different district, and they won't know anyone at their new school. Even entering a new grade—with the task of navigating an unfamiliar classroom—can make kids feel self-conscious.

Thankfully, schools are open over the summer.

Healthychildren.org suggests touring the grounds and classrooms with your child several weeks before school starts so they're practiced in the new environment.



Additionally, they urge parents to remember that “you don't need to wait until the first day of class to ask for help. Schools are open to addressing any concerns a parent or child might have, including the specific needs of a child, over the summer. The best time to get help might be one to two weeks before school opens.”



Practical Ways to Help Your Kids Stay Healthy:

Healthychildren.org suggests a few tips:

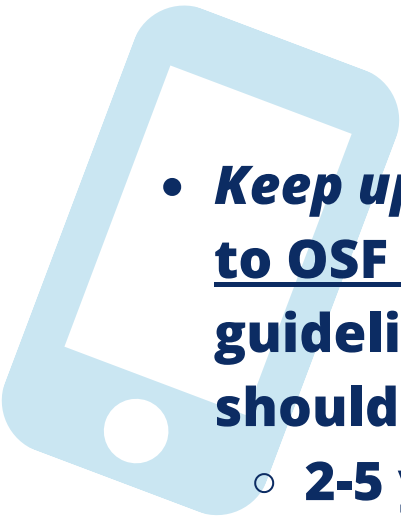
- ***Make sure your kids get plenty of sleep—and start their new sleep schedule a few weeks before going back to school to help ease them into the routine.***



- ***Feed them healthy food***—especially a nutritious, protein-packed breakfast on school days. Healthy food doesn't have to be complicated or too expensive. Making sure your kids have raw fruit, veggies, and nuts to snack on goes a long way!



**Have a picky eater?
Try serving fruit in smoothies or adding blended veggies to familiar foods like spaghetti sauce.**

- 
- ***Keep up with their digital health*—according to OSF healthcare, the following are general guidelines for how much time children should spend staring at screens:**

- **2-5 years old: No more than one hour per day co-viewing with a parent or sibling**
- **5-17 years old: Generally no more than two hours per day, except for homework**



- **Consider “Screen-free bedrooms: There should be no screens in the bedroom, and children generally shouldn’t view a screen for two hours before bedtime.**



The reason is a screen’s blue light can prevent the brain from knowing when it’s time to get ready for sleep.”



Try reading (or audiobooks), outdoor activities, art, or family time instead of relying on screens to entertain your kids.



Have a Bully-Proof Plan!

Coffee and Carpool has some great advice for helping your child develop healthy boundaries, tactics, and smarts for navigating a world where there are bullies.

- **“Ensure your child has several different positive peer groups.” Bullies tend to target children who are alone, so get to know your kids’ friends and *have a handle on who will stand up for your child or who might be bullying your child.* It’s also helpful for children to be surrounded by kids who are enriching their life so they aren’t afraid to build relationships.**





Encourage your child to be an includer. If they invite the lonely children to sit with them or play with them, they're helping protect others and themselves.

- **“Volunteer in your child’s class so you see them at school in their classroom environment and get to know their classmates.”**
- **Keep consistent, open communication. Nicole from Coffee and Carpool shares this story: “At dinner each night, we also talk about the happy part and the sad part of our day. Sometimes we call it 'High/Low' and talk about the high of their day and the low of their day. One night my daughter broke down in tears because she was finally ready to tell us something that had happened to her days earlier at her music concert. It took three days of High/Low before she was ready to tell us her true low.”**



- **“Point out injustices when you see them.”**
This is a great way to train your kids to have the right mindset towards bullies. If they believe that bullying behavior is wrong, they will be less likely to tolerate it and less likely to hide what’s been happening to them out of fear of “tattling.”



- **Make sure your kids know that there is nothing wrong with them if they are bullied.**



In conclusion:

Make sure you take time to rest with your kids at the end of the week. It can be tempting to be involved in as much as possible, but it's okay to limit each child to one extracurricular—or do an extracurricular as a family.

Save your mental health by saying no when you can and choosing to rest or do something fun as an entire family on a regular basis. Remember, your kids can still learn while having fun!

This guide is not an exhaustive resource, but we hope you found it helpful. If you're looking for more specialized information or details, visit our website at nwef.org

Below are some resources that may help you:

[Blog - NWEF](#)

[Empowering Parents](#)

[Parenting - Focus on the Family](#)