

Parents: *Preparing for a Successful Start of a New School Year*

By: Steven B. Gordon, Ph.D., ABPP

Director, Behavior Therapy Associates
Somerset, New Jersey

What a wonderful summer: your child has enjoyed two months of swimming, family trips, playing all day, staying up late, sleeping late, and hanging out in pajamas in the morning. But think about what he or she has not done for two months: gone to bed at a reasonable hour gotten up early, gotten dressed quickly, packed up all their materials for school, and balanced homework and after school activities. A sudden start in September may feel like a shock, but with a little anticipation and planning you can help to make this transition occur as smooth as possible. Below is a list of some steps to consider:

Sleep for school. We all know how important sleep is in order to function effectively so the first thing to address is to begin a shaping process from your child's current summer sleep schedule to the school sleep schedule. Begin by setting an earlier bedtime by 15 minutes each day and by waking your child 15 minutes earlier. Start this process early enough, usually one to two weeks, to make this a smooth transition.

Organize a work space. Even though you probably had one during the school year, there is a good chance it has been altered in some way over the past two months. Begin the preparation now and get your child involved in the clean-up and re-organization. Make it fun by going on the shopping trip for new supplies as the natural reward since many children look forward to the opportunity to get new supplies. Set the guidelines ahead of time for this shopping trip with regards to the items being purchased so that the costs fit the family budget.

Jump Start Learning. If your child has not been reading nor doing any academic work over the summer, establish a brief time for this to occur prior to the official start of school. Make it fun and be sure to follow this with a preferred fun activity.

Rehearsal. If your child is going to school for the first time or is going to a new school plan on a visit to the school. Even if you can't get into the building a visit to the playground can help to reduce anxiety. Some schools will allow meeting the teacher or even permit a visit to the classroom.

Talk it out. Talk to your child about the new school year. Be enthusiastic and positive as your tone - attitudes are contagious! Encourage your child to talk about what is on his or her mind. Listen! Listen! Listen!

Be a detective. Pay attention and look for any signs that may signal distress. These may be obvious or they may be subtle. Negative comments about school or changes in behavior like stomach pains should not be ignored. Use these as "door openers" for further exploration.

Take it easy. Don't expect to start the year with the routines perfect. Like anything, the new school year routine may be uncomfortable at first and take some getting used to. Be patient, with your child and with yourself.

BTA provides clinical services, consultation, and training using evidence-based approaches within the context of sensitivity and compassion, while recognizing the uniqueness of each individual and setting.

Phone: 732-873-1212; Fax: 732-873-2584

E-mail: behaviortherapy@aol.com

www.behaviortherapyassociates.com