

Home Routines Can Help Children with Back to School

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When warm summer days give way to cooler temperatures and shorter daylight hours, and school buses fill our roads after two months of absence, we know it's 'back to school.' Parents do their best to prepare children for an easy transition to their first days of school. Yet many parents of children heading off to kindergarten, high school, college or university, also experience an uncomfortable sense of separation, a bi-polar emotion to the joy they have in seeing their children mature and become independent.

Surprisingly, one of the best ways parents can help young children face new experiences well is by establishing home routines. Routines reassure children that their basic needs for nutrition, hygiene, rest, play, and love will be met throughout their day. Routines give children comfort and safety and help them develop the organizational and self-management skills they need to grow into independent adults.

For most of us, routines change or relax during the summer. Especially as children face new school experiences, re-establishing home routines give children comfort, and confidence to face the unfamiliar.

Good routines respect children's individuality and give fair warning before transitions. Bedtime routines, for example, help children move from play to sleep gradually. Telling children that bath time will be in ten minutes gives children time to decide how they will wrap up their imaginative play before they get into the tub. Bathing and brushing teeth slows the pace and, once ready for bed, story times offer children something to look forward to before the lights go out.

Stories add value to bedtime routines. Snuggling up to share books with children can create an important parent-child bonding time, and a time of quiet and calm while sparking children's curiosity and learning.

The best books for bedtime are the ones that match children's developmental age and interests.

Babies enjoy books with photos of other babies. "Baby Faces" is just one many board books by Margaret Miller that captivates most infants.

Sandra Boynton's board books are hugely popular with toddlers. "The Going to Bed Book" is well-loved, as is "Dinosaur's Binket" - a touch and feel book for babies and toddlers.

Preschoolers who can't fall asleep for fear of the dark will relate to "Can't You Sleep Little Bear?" by Martin Waddell. Little Bear cannot settle for the night. Big Bear does everything he can think of to help his cub fall asleep. Finally Little Bear does, in Big Bear's arms.

Early primary school age children who know traditional fairy tales will enjoy the twist to "The Three Little Pigs" in Eugene Trivizas' telling of "The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig".

A great book for back to school is "The Kissing Hand" by Audrey Penn. Chester Raccoon is afraid to leave home. His mother kisses his hand and tells him that her love will always be with him. Whenever he is afraid or uncertain, Chester can put his kissed hand to his cheek and feel her love. It helps Chester a great deal, and Chester intuitively gives his mom a kissed hand too.