

August 2024 Issue – Quality time with Family & Back-to-School

Back-to-school: transitions for students and parents

Transitioning from the relaxed days of summer back into the routine of classes can be bumpy, even for those children who enjoy school and are eager to return. The increase in structure, demands on time both academically and socially, and expectations of school can make any family feel pressed and pulled. Here are a few tips to make the back-to-school transition easier:



- 1. Preparation:** Anything that can be done early - such as school shopping and physicals - can be helpful. If your child has not attended school before this year, it may be helpful to plan a visit a day or two before school starts. Many schools offer Kindergarten orientation or will be happy to show transfer students around the school before the start date.
- 2. Practice:** Start your school routine a week early for bed and wake times. Decrease TV watching. Incorporate bedtime reading. Have clothes ready for the next day – even if they are play clothes. Whatever your school-year routine, it can help to get started a little early. Kids may grumble, but it will help them get back to the school schedule easier.
- 3. Planning:** Parents also can help by getting themselves ready. Make sure to have your own needs extra organized: work clothes prepared for that first week; grocery shopping done; household chores as complete as possible, and dinners prepared ahead of time. Anticipate challenges the first week; the more you can be ready to roll with those, the easier it will be for everyone.
- 4. Presence:** School can be stressful, especially at the beginning. Be ready to spend extra time with your kids helping them get into the routine of homework again. Listen to their frustrations and offer empathy rather than jumping right into “fix-it” mode. Ask them to recount the positive things that they are experiencing. Be flexible and ready for the fact that they will run late, not be able to find things, and be a little short-tempered. It will get better as they get back into their school routine.

Quality time: getting active as a family

During the busy school year, it can be difficult for kids and caregivers alike to make time for physical activity and each other. As you transition back to school this month, a great way to connect and get your kids talking is by getting active together! With so many ways to move, you are sure to find a fun way to sneak in some exercise. Check out these ideas:

- **Have a family dance party.** Cue up two or three of your kids' favorite songs and cut a rug—you all be laughing and getting that heart rate up in no time.
- **Take a walk:** Make it fun by adding a scavenger hunt spin to the walk; give the kids a list of animals, plants, or objects to find along the way.
- **Create your own obstacle course:** Get creative with household items or toys to make your own course, encouraging your kids to take the lead. Make it a race or just have fun!
- **Go for a bike ride:** Check out a local bike trail on the weekend or ride around your neighborhood.
- **Play a game:** There are too many options to count in this category, but a few examples include playing tag, catch, kick the can, hopscotch, or four square.



The social connection



As kids return to school, screen time and social media use may ramp up again. Smartphones and social media have brought about video chatting, photo sharing, group messages, and non-stop news; all of which have benefits. The consequences, however, have begun to rear their ugly heads, especially for our youth.

Research shows an unmistakable correlation between the rise of smartphones and social media and the decline of adolescent mental health. The possible reasons are varied and vast, likely including:

1. Increased loneliness due to less in-person interaction
2. Decrease in sleep quantity and quality due to nighttime screen use
3. Constant comparison and fear of missing out
4. Hyperconnectivity by always being connected to peers without a break

Five tips for improving social media consumption

1. **Be a role model.** Decrease your own use of devices and social media, especially when at home. Be present and connect. Use some of the family activity ideas above for more in-person connectivity.
2. **Set limits.** Create boundaries of when devices can be used and have a designated spot for phones and tablets to be placed out of sight to reduce temptation.

3. **Buy an alarm clock.** Instead of using a phone alarm to wake up, get an alarm clock. Charge devices across the room from the bed instead of on the bedside table.
4. **Have meaningful conversations.** Talk about social media with your kids. Ask them what they think and how they feel—use the consequences listed above as discussion points.
5. **Use an app to limit screen time and social media use.** There are several options for both Android and iOS to help limit and monitor screen time. A quick internet search is all you need to find the best options for you and your family.

Sources: Child Mind Institute (childmind.org), Monitoring the Future Study through the University of Michigan (monitoringthefuture.org), KidsHealth.org