



# BACK TO SCHOOL: A Roadmap for Parents & Students for a Successful School Year!

By Jonathan Vickers

It seems like your children or teenagers are just home for the summer. Then, all of a sudden, we're into August. It feels like it's gone by very quickly and the commercials start on TV: "It's the most wonderful time of the year!" All of a sudden, commercials or newspaper flyers from various department stores or office supply stores inundate your home and the stress begins for families of a summer suddenly ending and a new school year on the horizon. It does not have to be that way however, with a little bit of planning and communication with your children or teens, "The Back to School" stress/nightmare can be handled deftly, strategically and most importantly, economically.

For Parents, or single Parents, with working families and possibly no vacation time in the summer, time management is crucial to pre-plan a successful transition for your kids, a "Back to School" frame of mind.

Here are some starting points and a roadmap to get everyone on the same page.

**1** Mark on a calendar on the fridge or better yet on your computer calendar/ phone, a date and time you will sit down with your children/teens and discuss a "Back to School" plan. Children and Teens need to be involved and communication is key. It is possible one of your kids is just starting school or graduating middle school, and will be starting High School, or maybe it is the final year of High School. Whatever the situation, make a morning or afternoon date and start the planning process.

**2** For Parents, some key issues to focus on initially is to book appointments for dental/eye doctor/physician if your child/teen has not had an exam in the past 12 months. Especially for dental or eye care, if your family is covered under a group plan. The physician visit may cover shots or if your kids may have a late summer cold or flu. We all know the first 2 weeks of school, children and teens bring home different ailments or health issues to start the school year. Be proactive and make the time while doctor's offices are relatively quiet during the summer.

**3** Go on-line to your school board or schools and check on what your kids/teens may need for school supplies, computers or tablets, dress codes, as well as rules of conduct for the school and potential after school activities for your children. If it is not listed, then call the school and be proactive. Talk to the teacher if possible. Most teachers are back in the school during the month of August. Any advance information can save you time and money. It will also be part of the discussion with your kids on dress codes and rules of conduct.

**4** If you have a home computer your kids use, now is the time to bring it in to a computer repair shop and have a computer diagnostic done. This will determine if there are potential computer viruses and they will clean hard drive, delete unnecessary programs and files to allow for more memory. You may want to buy extra flash drive sticks in case your kids lose them.



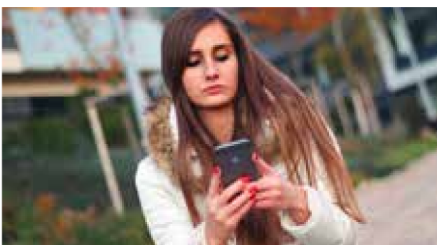
**5** Make sure you budget for computer paper and ink cartridges for the printer. Check out sales weekly. Buy early, not necessarily when you need items immediately.

**6** If your teen owns a cell phone, make sure they are on a family plan. Also make sure they do not over use on downloads at the start of the school year. Have a discussion on cell phone use and text use, especially in school. Teens should know the school rules on cell phones so they know if they're allowed in the classroom.

**7** Clothing and dress shoes are always a budget breaker for families and parents. Everyone wants to wear the latest fashions and footwear to start the school year. Sit down with your kids/teens and establish budgets and communicate what is appropriate and what is not. Again, schools or the school board may have rules that students have to follow.

**8** Budget time for haircuts and again make sure your kids are following school guidelines. Coloring of hair may or may not be appropriate.

**9** If you have a teenager, have a discussion on time management for High School. Like a lot of teenagers, it is possible they are dating, have a part time job, participate in sports or other school activities. Make sure you learn their schedule and establish ground rules for their time and making them accountable for their school work. Communication is key here. It is important to make sure your teens know there are boundaries.



**10** 2 weeks before school starts, have your children start going to bed at an earlier time to re-adjust their sleeping habits. Make sure they get up at the same time they are going to school so they can adjust to morning wakeups. Teenagers are tough to change as sleeping in is commonplace. Work on slowly having them go to bed earlier and getting them up at the proper time. It does have an affect on learning and homework.

**11** Homework- All children and especially teenagers will bring home homework. Talk about this upfront and establish a time frame and when they should work afterschool on their studies. It may work for some after dinner or for some, before.

**12** Have a plan for lunches and dinner meals for the school week. Put a healthy meal plan together and school lunches. Have healthy snacks for after school as well. If parents work they may not be home in time for dinner. Pre-plan some dinner meals and make them ahead of time and freeze them. Healthy dinners and snacks help learning and focus for teenagers and kids.

**13** Find out about local library activities after school, or after school activities your children may enjoy. For teenagers, talk about what their interests are: sports, music, arts, dance, etc. and have them pick something they would like to do. Some libraries in the area offer computer or gaming afternoons after school or book reading programs. Most of these are FREE.

**14** Have a babysitter on speed dial. School cancellations happen or PA days come quickly. Make sure you have a backup plan, especially with working families or single parents. Maybe a neighbor can help in a pinch, but it's best to be prepared.

**15** Lastly, have a talk with your children about any stresses or concerns they may have about going back to school. Listen, don't over react if a delicate issue is brought up. Work with your kids through any concerns or problems and if necessary professional help is out there.

It is not easy today for parents or single parents of teenagers or children. There is a lot more technology out there than when we went to school. The social issues of the day (bullying, drugs, alcohol, body appearance, mental health issues, stress, cell phone use, Facebook, Instagram) can be especially challenging for families and parents. Do not be afraid to communicate with your kids and if you need help or have concerns, don't be afraid to call and ask for professional help.

Starting a school year can be daunting for families on all levels, but with a little bit of pre-planning and including your kids in the process, it can be rewarding and help bring families closer together. Don't wait start the process today!

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