



5 top tips for smooth school mornings

School mornings can be frustrating for many parents. There is lots to remember. We're wanting to encourage our children to be independent and do things for themselves, yet sometimes it's faster and easier to do it for them. We say the same thing a billion times over... have you got your hat? Put your shoes on! Make your bed! ... If you're reading this, you've been there done that or maybe you're preparing yourself for the new school year ahead. Whether your kids are starting out at school or have already been at school for this year or two, here are our top tips for making mornings amazing.

Tip 1: Be ready for your own emotional journey

Always check-in and acknowledge your own emotional state as you start the day. Are you feeling tired, sad, stressed, worried or cranky about something that's actually going on for you (rather than your child). We may not even be aware of what is simmering below the surface and we can unintentionally put that energy onto our kids and the morning atmosphere. Acknowledge where you're at (probably completely understandable concerns too), then breathe deeply and then 'clear the screen', start afresh being as present as possible for every conversation with your child.

Even if it's your first time with the school routine, you may well be familiar with the morning challenges or chaos because you've had your child at childcare or pre-school, so you'll know what mornings can be like. If you are starting out, keep in mind, a child starting school can be an emotional journey for the parent as much as for the child because our memories of our own school experience come flooding back, be they great or not so great or simply memories. It may be mixed. It is important to acknowledge our own experience as our own. It was what it was and now it's our children's time. Allow children to start with a fresh, clear and curious space, where we're not putting our experiences onto them or overly influencing them. They'll discover what's to come as they grow and learn. Notice what your existing beliefs are about the school experience, and be aware of what you're then telling them leading up to starting school, each day and as the weeks go by. Apply this same technique to every day, yesterday's morning may not be today's as today won't be tomorrow. Start afresh each and every day.

Tip 2: Be curious and present

Starting school can be a light-bulb experience for many children, when suddenly someone turns on the light, they become more social, they start to read, write and develop new skills on so many different levels. It might be body strength as they master the monkey bars, it could be walking into the canteen line and asking to buy something all by themselves. Be curious and very present for your child, listening to both their verbal and non-verbal signals of how they're tracking, feeling and most importantly what they're thinking in the early days as they're starting out and once they're into the swing of each term. What your child is not saying is as relevant as what they're saying. So be curious and very present for them, listen, watch and ask questions.



Apply this curiosity first thing in the morning, are they focused on what needs to happen? What's going on for them? Do they know how to do certain things or do you need to break a task into steps. For example, I found myself grabbing the hairbrush from my daughter's hair and wanting to do it myself because it was faster, yet, she wants to do it herself, so she would avoid coming to me, runaway etc. Listen for their cues. What are they really trying to say? We now let her do her own hair, it looks messy and she struggles putting the band in, yet, she's learning, getting better at it and we're all happier. Look at all of the different things going on. A friend shared she is still making her son's week bix milk warm, so he couldn't prepare his own breakfast. Yet, perhaps it's time for cold milk in a small jug low down in the fridge, so he can do it himself. We moved the cereals down lower and they can help themselves now. We may assume we have to do everything, yet they are quite capable and clever.

Tip 3: Have a plan

School years have a whole new game of logistics that you may have thought you had mastered with childcare or pre-school. Yet it's different again with school starting. It is continuous. (Some days I call it monotonous!!) The same or very similar routine day in day out. There are school holidays to consider, maybe activities to attend, home play time to fit in, sibling's connection time to consider if applicable. And as a parent of course fitting your own working life, social life and managing the family in amongst it all. So planning is very important. Some of us live day to day, however it's great to start with the end of the year in mind or even the end of the term and work backwards with a blank piece of paper and calendar.

Ask yourself –

If we'd had a fantastic term or year, what would that look, sound and feel like for all of our family?

Then write down all the elements that would make it great for you and your family. What you would have achieved? Why is it important to you? Then break down what you want to achieve into the action steps to make it happen.

Remember kids need to be kids, they love their down time, playing and they love the simple things like time with us, hanging out - be that in a park, on the floor playing lego or chilling out and watching some TV or snuggling up on the couch with us.

Tip 4:

Use empowering language

The meaning of communication is the response we get. If we're not liking the responses we're getting or not in the family environment, then change the way it's being said. Take 100% responsibility for this. Start with saying things how you want them to be rather than how you don't want it. It's habit to say, 'don't do this, don't do that', instead start using words like 'remember to, or start focusing on, have you, will you, are you?' Whilst the removal of treats, bribery, rewards etc. works well in some families, empowering language works even better and has a terrific long term effect on relationship building and motivation. It can take some practice to shift the language and remember this technique, however it is worth sticking with, because it is really powerful.



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Focus on what's important within the family unit versus looking specifically at the behaviours (in many case unwanted behaviours). For example, talk about gratitude, team-work, kindness and safety. Remove But – the negator, Just – the minimiser and Try – the attemptor from vocabulary. Focus the conversations on what matters and is important for you as a parent, as a family, and as a team.

For a great team to succeed on the court, field or pitch, they work together, they are focused and committed. From an early age kids respond really well to being part of a team, being valued, cherished and significant. Family life can be that too when everyone, even young children know and learn what's important and needed. From day to day, week to week, month to month and year to year, school life and the experiences will change and evolve as we grow and learn as parents as our children do.

Tip 5: Embrace routine

Children thrive on a consistent and sensible routine that makes it easy for them to remember and fun to partake in. There are jobs that have to get done. Start encouraging team-work and participation. Break down jobs into stages, can you share the roles? Do part of it each. Starting out this is a great way to teach them. For example, they put the cereal in their bowl and you add the milk. They get dressed and you do the buttons or the zippers. They can be remarkably responsible when encouraged to take the lead, choose and do what needs to happen. It works in well with understanding time - how long things actually take to get done, combined with skill set (do they know how to tie their shoelaces yet or make their bed? Add in some self-discipline because yes, it is so easy to get distracted by playing with the toys. Likewise we as adults, parents and carers can be more efficient when we're in a routine too, not getting distracted or multitasking by doing many things at one time. Routine can create efficiency and consistency for kids and adults alike.

Enjoy the journey and here's to making school mornings magic.

Genevieve Matthews x

The School's Coming Routine Kit is the ideal gift for parents and children aged 4 to 8 either starting out at school for the first time or already in Kindergarten, year 1 or 2.



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