

School DAZE: How to improve the chaos of BACK TO SCHOOL!!

Back to school means a return to homework evenings, hectic mornings, school lunches, car pooling, sports and cheerleading practice, tutoring, and any number of additional responsibilities for you and your child. Simply trying to get everyone out of the house on time, with all they need for the day, is a job in itself. Now more than ever parents need to promote responsibility and cooperation for all members of the family, BUT not to forget the fun! Here are a few suggestions for playing and working together as a family;

Play & Work Together

To keep your household humming along and organized, both work and play are key factors to success. As the saying goes. . . *'All work and no Play . . .* "Playing together builds strong bonds and warm memories -- you're in effect saying 'We have a great time together,'" says Nick Stinnett, Ph.D., professor of human development at the University of Alabama and author of *Fantastic Families: 6 Proven Steps to Building a Strong Family*. In his 25-year study, which tracked 14,000 families nationwide, he found the happiest families spent time playing outdoor/physical games, board and card games together.

Clean Up as a Clan

Who knew that clearing out & organizing the garage together could yield more than mounds of trash or ten-year-old paint cans? Doing chores as a family can be a major bliss booster. You work, you talk, you get closer. "Children might grumble when they're helping wash dishes or sort laundry, but these things create a sense of achievement and connection," says Stinnett. Even running everyday errands with your child, whether walking the dog or going to the gas station, can provide short but sweet bonding time.

Hand Out the Hugs

Anyone who's ever been comforted by an embrace, the simple a touch of a friend or had a massage knows what a powerful force touch can be. "Strong families show a lot of physical affection," says Stinnett. "Touch communicates -- and nurtures -- connections. Even a simple pat on the back at a difficult moment can strengthen the bond." And don't underestimate the power of silly displays of affection, like rubbing noses, big ole fashioned 'Bear Hugs' or trading butterfly kisses.

Make Family Meals a Must

A recent study by Columbia University showed that kids whose families eat regular, relaxed meals together are not only less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol and develop eating disorders-they are also more likely to achieve higher grades. Family dinners do not have to consist of gourmet, five-course meals. Serve simple, healthy meals, turn off the television and unplug the phones, (at our home the dining table is a cell-free zone) and enjoy each other's company. And if everyone in your family is on a different schedule and can't make it to dinner- don't worry! Consider instating an evening family snack time where everyone can review their day with each other before bedtime-family conversation and information sharing is VERY important. The trick is to find what works best for you family and turn it into a routine.

And speaking of routines. . . every household regardless of how large or small, has chores that must be done to stay organized and less chaotic. Kids need to know they are important, contributing members of their family. It's never too early or too late to give your child jobs and responsibilities. Working on a chore provides opportunities to practice and acquire new skills, makes children feel useful, and teaches them appreciation for the work that has to be done in a family and for those who do it. It's tempting to try to do it all yourself, thinking you can do it faster or better. However, each time you "do" for your children, you rob them of opportunities to grow and learn cooperation and responsibility. Start with the basics and add jobs as your child acquires new skills and capabilities. The following suggestions will help get you on the right track and help your child be successful:

AGE APPROPRIATE JOBS

- ❖ Take time to show your children how to do the job right, work with them until they learn the job. When they are ready to go solo, let them know you are there if they need help. Step back and allow them to find their style or pace.

- ❖ Comment on the contribution, not the quality of the work. (Remember, an adult can do it better, faster, etc. That is not the point!!) -- **“You made your bed!!!---GOOD JOB!”**
- ❖ Involve your kids in creating a list of jobs that need to be done to help the family.
- ❖ Provide kid-sized tools and equipment when available, such as small brooms, mops, rakes, dustpans and small outdoor tools.
- ❖ It may help to assign a time for weekly chores, where the whole family works on their jobs at the same time, (many hands make a quick work).
- ❖ Don't “nag” your children to do their chores, let them know they can go on to the next activity after they have finished. Simply state “when you have finished bussing your spot..., cleaning your room..., sweeping the porch..., etc., you may play with your toys, eat lunch, etc.”
- ❖ Do not feel sorry for your child if they don't want to do their job, and do it for them (they will learn quickly to push this button if you allow it). Simply state “we all have jobs to keep our house and family running, it's up to you how long it takes you to do yours.”

Age Appropriate Jobs

18 months-Two years Old

Pick up toys when done playing
Put dirty clothes in basket

Throw away trash, tissues, and wrappers
Begin wiping up own spills



Two- Three Years Old

Choosing clothing and dressing themselves
Pick up toys and put in appropriate place
Set table w/napkins, utensils, plates and cups
Put away groceries in low shelves & drawers
Unload utensils from dishwasher
Pick up own room, begin making bed
Clean-up their own place at the table
and take dishes to the counter

Sweep floor, rake leaves
Put books and magazines away
Fold small laundry items
Wipe up own spills
Put away own clean clothes
Tear lettuce, butter bread, grate cheese, mix or stir
batter, etc. for family meals.



Four Years Old

Dressing self
Set table-even with good dishes
Help with grocery list and shopping
Pet feeding schedule
Clean own room and make beds
Help prepare meals
Pour own drink & serve self (own plate)
Clearing food items from table
Hold mixer to mix batter or whip potatoes

Fold small laundry items, put away
Help do dishes/load dishwasher
Put groceries away
Help dust and vacuum
Help make sandwiches for lunch
Get the mail
Measure ingredients for cooking
(with Supervision)
Prepare cold cereal, butter toast



Five Years Old

Sort laundry, whites in one pile, colors in another
Help serve family plates at mealtime
Make their own lunch or simple breakfast,
and clean up afterwards
Help wash windows and blinds
Scrub sinks and bathtub
Help clean out and wash the car
Sort recycling containers

Remove laundry from dryer, fold etc.
Help with yard work
Make simple menus and recipes
Bring in and stack firewood
Brush cats and/or dogs
Pay for small purchases
Take out trash
Bundle newspapers



Six, Seven, Eight Years Old

Rake leaves and pull weeds
Make lunches (home and school) and clean up
Cook simple foods (eggs, hot dogs, soup grilled
cheese, mini-pizzas, quesadillas, etc.)
Prepare simple desserts (no bake desserts)
Answer the phone and get person to phone
Putting all own clothing away (hanging also)

Water flowers and plants
Bathe pets and take for walks
Operate microwave and dishwasher
Wash the car (inside & out)
Clean floors
Shake rugs
Help organize drawers and closets



Nine, Ten Years Old

Operate washer and dryer
Prepare family meals
Help with menu planning
Organize closets and garage
Keep track of own appointments (school, gym,
dance, music, etc.)
Help plan family entertainment
Answer phones and take accurate messages
Be home alone for short durations

Change bedding, wash dirty linen
Prepare cookie and cake mixes
Buy groceries using a list
Do neighborhood jobs
Perform basic first-aid
Plan own birthday party
Act as "host", wait on guests
Help with home improvement projects
Handle small sums of money



Eleven, Twelve Years Old

Be home alone...*(depending upon the child)*
Keep track of and get own appointments
(doctor, dentist, extra-curricular activities) within
biking distances
Take city bus
Have/manage a paper route
Choose and be responsible for a hobby
Check oil and water in car and refill

Help parent paint or repair things
Earn their own money (babysitting,
pet sitting, and other neighborhood jobs
Handle earned money/open a 'Savings Account'
Mow and edge lawn
Run own errands and help with family errands
Track/manage own hobbies/activities
All of above jobs and responsibilities!!!

Excerpt from '**The Parenting Puzzle**' by *Alix L. Hall/Executive Director*

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