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Start the New School Year Off Right

A new school year is here, and it brings with it the opportunity for students to erase mistakes from past years. This year could be the year that students finally stop procrastinating when it comes to homework. This could also be the year that they start enjoying math, or learn to organize their study notes.

Aside from the occasional back-to-school jitters, it's a great time to be a student—the school year is fresh and new, and full of possibilities.

As the first days of school pass into the first weeks, jitters begin to fade. Students settle into the routine of their new classes.

Unfortunately, they can also find themselves settling back into bad habits from previous years. Before you know it, your family is rushing around in the morning, homework is being forgotten, and poor test marks are rolling in.

It's important to start the new school year off on the right foot. That's because it's just as easy to develop good habits as it is to fall back into bad habits. The trick is to implement better school habits while it is still early in the school year. The sooner that students make good school habits part of their daily routine, the more likely it is that they will keep these habits for the entire school year.

Preparing properly for the new school year is important. That doesn't mean stocking up on school supplies—although they can help students feel excited about returning to the classroom. It means putting aside some time during the early days of the new school year (or even before school starts) to review challenges from past years and make a plan to deal with those issues right off the bat.

By knowing what potential challenges they might be facing in the coming year, students are better equipped to avoid repeating the same issues.

Being prepared: it's best way to start the school year off right.

This newsletter has many tips and strategies that can help your family get this school year on track early on and keep it there for the entire year!

Enjoy!



A Good Attitude Starts the Year Off Right!

In school, a good attitude goes far. A good attitude means a willingness to learn, openness, and receptivity.

When students have a positive outlook about learning, they groan less when presented with extra homework, and they will do what they can to stay on top of material—they make notes, and study a little bit every night...without complaint.

Attitude is a state of mind. It lives in the brain. This is important because the brain is highly adaptive—it can learn new things everyday. This makes it possible for kids with bad attitudes to become kids with good attitudes!



School Strategies

Don't Leave This School Year to Chance

When it comes to school performance, don't take a "wait-and-see" approach; anticipate potential issues and make an informed judgment about what this school year will bring. Knowing how to identify common school problems, and how to avoid them, helps students get on the track to better grades.

There are more than a few common trouble areas that most students deal with at one time or another. This list will help you identify the biggest student trouble spots.

- **Disorganization.** Being disorganized is a major issue for many students. Whether it is a messy book bag, an unkempt locker, confusing notes, or sloppy handwriting, being disorganized makes it difficult for students to stay focused.
- **Homework.** Homework is a school reality. Avoiding it won't make it go away. The sooner a student develops good homework habits—such as doing homework at the same time at night, every night—the easier it becomes. Put a homework strategy together and stick with it.
- **Study Skills.** Most students don't really know how to study simply because study skills are very rarely taught. To be effective, studying doesn't have to take hours. Proper study skills reduce stress, cut down on study time, and help students during testing.
- **Attendance.** One of the easiest ways to get good grades is to show up. Missing class every now and again might not seem like a big deal, but a portion of a student's grade can come from classroom participation—students can't participate if they are not in class!
- **Forgetting Work.** Students shouldn't rely on their memory to help them remember all their homework and assignments. Most schools provide students with their own agenda or planner to help keep track of their work. Agendas are the most important school tool!
- **Not Asking for Help.** If a student had trouble last year, chances are that the same problem will become an issue again. Don't wait and see if the problem will reappear, ask for preventative help and get on track before it becomes an issue.

School Year Resolutions

You don't have to wait until January to make a resolution! Back-to-school is a great time to make positive lifestyle changes. There's already so much that's new in a new school year, it just makes sense to add new-and-improved habits to the list. Check out these before-and-after school resolutions that can be implemented any time of the year!

This school year, I resolve to...

- ✓ **Wake up earlier.** Set alarm clocks 15 minutes earlier than the usual wake-up times to give your family extra time in the morning. You can use the extra minutes eat a healthy breakfast together.
- ✓ **Watch Less TV/Limit Internet time.** This doesn't mean going TV-free or giving up Facebook. Instead, eliminate one half-hour of screen time per day. Try making the resolution to not waste time watching reruns of shows that you've already seen.
- ✓ **Get stuff organized at night.** Choose clothing the night before, re-pack book bags, and prepare lunches to reduce the morning rush.
- ✓ **Use a Calendar.** Re-hang the family wall calendar in a more visible spot. Take 2-3 minutes to have everyone write what's on his or her school and social agendas.
- ✓ **Go to Bed Earlier.** A better night's sleep means that children (and adults) will be less sluggish and more mentally alert during the day.
- ✓ **Do homework right away.** The sooner that students develop a good homework routine, the more likely it is that they will follow it. Parents can help by also doing work, reading, or checking something off their to-do list for an hour each night.
- ✓ **Improve eating habits.** Avoid sugary treats and too-heavy meals to keep the brain alert throughout the school day.
- ✓ **Read more.** Reading has been shown to increase vocabulary and boost comprehension. Plus, reading before bed is very relaxing!
- ✓ **Spend more time outside.** Take in some fresh air, vitamin D, and get the blood pumping with exercise. It increases circulation and keeps the brain happy, which makes learning easier.

Settling into the New School Year

Common milestones and pitfalls to keep an eye out for as students adjust to the new school year:

Early Grades:

- **Anxiety** about school should fade and **excitement** begins.
- Students should **talk about the classroom**, their teachers, and their new friends.
- A large part of the early years of **school is social**, including group play and recess.
- Early educational **development** is the groundwork for a child's **attitude** about school. Kids need to learn that **school is safe**, and that **learning can be fun**.
- Academically, the early years lay **critical groundwork**: children are building the **foundation** for future skills (counting, learning letters, and basic reading skills).
- **Watch out for**: slowly developing reading skills!

Middle Years:

- After a few weeks of school, students should be **comfortable** with their **school routine**.
- Jitters should dissipate in a week or two.
- If students are having **issues**, whether it's not keeping up with **homework**, or getting easily **frustrated**, now is the time to **seek help**.
- Getting help while the school year is young means that students can easily repair problems and **get on track**.
- The sooner that students get on track, the less they will **struggle** as they progress to new grades.
- **Watch out for**: confidence and attitude issues!

High School Years:

- 9th graders may be very nervous about high school. Anxiety should fade after a few weeks.
- Each grade starts off with a big splash, often with **homework and assignments** from the very **first day of class**.
- After a month in school, many students have already dealt with **essays, major projects, and midterms**.
- There is **no time to waste**—first **report cards** are coming soon!
- Bad test marks can set a **negative tone**.
- Extra support helps students get **organized**, stay **on track**, and **keep up** with the new curriculum.
- **Watch out for**: non-communication about school problems. Don't be shy about asking for help!



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IN FOCUS TIP

Ask about Oxford Learning's **Get Organized Boot Camp!**

A fun, four-lesson course designed to get kids on track in the new school year. Learn how to take notes, organize projects, use agendas properly, and set academic goals. It's a great—and affordable—way to start the year off right!

Ask us about it today!

Ten Tips To Start the Year Off Right

These ten tips help students (and their families) develop a plan of attack and prepare to have a more successful school year!

1. **Begin early.** Whether school is a week away or a month in, it's never too late to implement positive changes that can lead to better grades. However, the earlier that a student gets on track, the easier it is to stay there.
2. **Get informed.** Develop regular communication with the teacher so that both you and your child know what to expect at this grade level. Be informed of important school dates (big projects, standardized testing) well in advance to avoid last-minute scrambles.
3. **Use a family calendar.** Manage school, family, and extra curricular activities with a daily reminder courtesy of a large wall calendar.
4. **Homework.** Homework amounts increase every grade, and is often a sticky issue for families. Develop a homework strategy that works for your family early on, so that the homework gets done and you avoid the homework headaches.
5. **Study skills.** When a test looms, tensions can run high. Developing better study skills means that students can study better—not longer—and avoid test-stress.
6. **Take note.** One of the best ways to stay organized is to take good notes in class. Don't just use the middle of the paper—use the margins, the top, and the bottom. Underline and use multiple colors to highlight key points.
7. **Participate in class.** Unsure about a concept? Raise your hand! Put your hand up if you want to ask questions, solicit comments, or get feedback. Become an active participant in the classroom! Raise your hand to learn!
8. **Get help.** Avoid struggling this year from the get-go by making the decision to get professional support in the areas that need the most attention. It's good preventative medicine.
9. **Check in.** It's easy to want to wait until the first report card for an update on how a child is progressing, but why wait? If a child had difficulties last year, get help from day one and get on the path to a better school year.
10. **Turn on the brain.** The best tool a student has is between the ears. An active mind in the classroom makes homework and studying much easier...on the entire family. Paying attention in class and thinking actively about the material is the secret to an easier school year.