



A supportive guide for navigating the back-to-school chaos and starting the year strong

GET ORGANIZED

Back-to-school season comes with a lot of little things to remember. Use this checklist to get them out of your head and onto paper.

Cross it off the list if you know it's covered. Maybe you already bought it, your child can use what they have from last year, an appointment is already scheduled, or your child simply doesn't need it.

Leave it on the list if it still needs your attention in some way. :)

CLOTHING

- Tops
- Bottoms
- Undergarments
- Socks
- Shoes
- Fall coat
- Gym clothes / athletic shoes, if needed
- Weather gear

Anything else we need?



SCHOOL SUPPLIES

- Backpack
- School supply list is covered
- Brown paper bags or lunch box/pail
- Lunch thermos / ice packs, if needed
- Water bottle

Anything else we need?



HEALTH & PERSONAL CARE

- Haircut
- Well check / physical
- Eye exam
- Medications and/or medical forms provided to school, if applicable

Anything else we need?



SCHOOL LOGISTICS

- Transportation / bus information
- Drop-off & pick-up plan
- School calendar saved
- Lunch account / meal plan

- Required school forms completed
- Emergency contact information updated
- First-day arrival time & location
- After-school plan
- School communication system / app set up
- Parent portal login works
- Important school contacts saved
- Extracurricular / sports schedules reviewed, if applicable

Anything else we need to take care of?

TIP: MAKE A LUNCH PLAN

Talk with your child about school lunches before the first day. Do they plan to **pack, buy, or do a combination of both?** Look at the school lunch menu together and get a sense of what they would like to do for the first week.

If your child prefers to pack, work together to choose foods that will make for a **healthy and tasty lunch**. Giving your child some input provides a sense of ownership over their lunch—and may make it more likely that they'll eat it!

Prepare the night before: Have your child help pack their lunch the night before and put it in the refrigerator, ready to grab in the morning. This can help mornings run more smoothly while also giving your child an opportunity to practice responsibility and independence.

DAMAGE CONTROL

Routines

Most families' routines naturally change during the summer. Maybe it's later dinners and later bedtimes. Maybe it's more screen time or a little less structure. Whatever your family's summer routine looks like, now is a good time to begin thinking about the shift back to school.

If you haven't already, start the conversation with your kiddos about how the routine will be shifting back into school mode. Talking about the changes ahead helps them mentally prepare for what's coming.

Over the next few weeks, begin slowly working those relaxed summer routines backward, bringing them closer to what your normal school routine looks like—while still allowing everyone to enjoy the last parts of summer.

This will look different for every family. You know your kids best, and you know what they need. Follow your gut.

Taking these proactive steps—having the conversation about the change and gradually moving toward the school-year routine—can help your kids adapt without feeling like the rug has been pulled out from under them on the first day of school.

The goal isn't to end summer early. It's to make the transition back to school a little smoother for everyone.



WHAT NEEDS A LITTLE ADJUSTING?

Take a minute to think about your family's summer routine.

What are some routines that I know need to be adjusted as we move back into school mode?

Which one or two changes would be most helpful to start working on now?

FAMILY RULES & EXPECTATIONS

Take some time to reflect on your family's rules and expectations as you head into the school year. Consider what your **non-negotiables** are and what might be **open for discussion**.

Once you've thought about where you can be flexible without compromising your child's well-being, have a family discussion.

When appropriate, allowing children to have a voice in setting family rules and expectations can support accountability and ownership. It also gives them an opportunity to practice communicating their needs, considering the needs of others, and being part of the decision-making process—which may make them more likely to follow the expectations you've established together.

Remember, having a voice doesn't mean having the final say. You are still the parent, and some expectations won't be negotiable. The goal is to give your child a meaningful role in the conversation while maintaining the boundaries you know they need.

WHAT ARE MY NON-NEGOTIABLES?

What rules or expectations are important for my child's well-being and our family's functioning?

WHERE CAN I BE FLEXIBLE?

What expectations might have some room for discussion or compromise?

WHAT DOES MY CHILD THINK?

Use the space below during your family conversation. What ideas, concerns, or suggestions does your child have?

EMOTIONAL PREP

As summer winds down, take some time to check in with your child about how they're feeling about summer ending and the start of a new school year.

Talk about their summer. What were their favorite parts? What will they miss? Were there any challenges or things that didn't go quite as they had hoped?

Then, shift the conversation toward school. How are they feeling about going back? What are they looking forward to? What concerns or worries do they have?

And don't forget to ask them:

“When difficult moments come up this school year, how can I best support you?”

Their answers might surprise you. Sometimes kids want help solving the problem. Sometimes they want advice. And sometimes they simply want someone to listen.

These conversations aren't solutions in themselves, and you don't need to have an answer for every worry your child shares. Having open conversations reinforces an important message: **your child is loved, supported, and doesn't have to navigate the difficult moments alone.**

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What was your favorite part of this summer?
- Was there anything about this summer that was hard?
- What are you going to miss about summer?
- How are you feeling about going back to school?
- What are you most looking forward to?
- Is there anything you're worried or nervous about?
- What do you think might be challenging this year?
- When you're having a hard time, what helps you most?
- What can I do to help support you?

Friendships and navigating relationships:

A new school year also means navigating friendships and interpersonal relationships again. What these conversations look like will depend on the age of your child.

For a teen, you might talk about things like gossip, peer pressure, changing friendships, boundaries, or handling conflict. For an elementary-aged child, the conversation might be about taking turns, including others, sharing, handling disagreements, and treating others how they would like to be treated.

This is also a great opportunity to talk about different perspectives. Two people can experience the same situation and walk away with very different feelings about what happened. Encourage your child to consider not only *"How did that make me feel?"* but also *"How might the other person have felt?"*

Remind them that friendships won't always be easy. There will be disagreements, hurt feelings, misunderstandings, and changing relationships. They don't have to handle every situation perfectly—but they can learn how to navigate those moments with kindness, respect, and healthy boundaries.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What do you think makes someone a good friend?
- What kind of friend do **you** want to be?
- How can you handle it when you and a friend disagree?
- What could you do if you notice someone being left out?
- How can gossip affect other people?
- What can you do if friends are encouraging you to do something you know isn't right?
- How might someone else see a situation differently than you do?
- What are some signs that a friendship feels healthy?
- When should you ask an adult for help?

It is not possible to prepare your child for every friendship problem they might encounter, and that's okay. The goal is to keep the conversation open so they know they can come to you when those difficult moments happen.

DON'T FORGET TO TAKE CARE OF YOU

Back-to-school season is **a lot of work!** It demands physical tasks, financial obligations, and emotional energy.

Most people can agree that parenting is rewarding and fun (*most of the time!*)—but that doesn't mean it's easy.

As you're working through the back-to-school process, remember to take some time for yourself, too. What that looks like will be different for everyone. Maybe it's ten minutes outside watching the bunnies, birds, and squirrels. Maybe it's a hot bath, a phone call with a family member, a walk around the block, or simply sitting quietly with your coffee.

Whatever those **“me time moments”** look like for you, work them in the best you can.

It's easy to think, *“I don't have time for that right now. I have too much to do.”* But it's amazing how even a short amount of time to ourselves can make a difference. When we return to our to-do list, we're often more efficient, more patient, and better equipped to handle what's in front of us.

Think of it this way, ten minutes for yourself isn't costing you time—it's buying you energy for what comes next.

WHAT HELPS ME RECHARGE?

What are a few small things that help you feel a little more like yourself?

THIS WEEK, I CAN MAKE A LITTLE TIME FOR...

Disclaimer: This resource was created using my original ideas, words, and professional philosophy. AI was used as a supportive tool to assist with proofreading, organization, list generation, and overall efficiency. — Frankie Hoffman