



Minimizing Morning Madness

Help your children thrive in school, rather than just survive, with effective morning routines. Ineffective morning routines leave parents and children frustrated and drained of energy before the demands of the day have barely begun. A vicious cycle of children's unacceptable behavior and parent's angry reactions that begins early in the day leaves a child discouraged and distracted. Although morning madness cannot always be avoided, a reliable routine helps to get school days off to a good start.

Older children should be responsible for planning their morning routines. It's a good idea to have younger children help plan their mornings. Children who participate in the decision making are more likely to cooperate in carrying out the plan. Moreover, giving children choices builds self-esteem.

For very young children or children who have trouble making choices, narrow the options. Say, "Would you like to eat breakfast as soon as you get up or after you have your shower?" Everyone should expect and factor in a few extra minutes for surprises.

Here are some specific ideas for minimizing morning madness and maximizing your child's readiness for the school day.

- ◆ Prepare the night before. Make lunches, pack school bags, set out clothes and set the breakfast table.
- ◆ Set up a "launching pad" - a place near your front door for children's school bags, coats, shoes, hats and gloves - so time isn't wasted trying to find a lost glove or a school bag.
- ◆ Wake up at least one half-hour before your children. Shower, get dressed and be ready to go when they wake.
- ◆ Get your children a reliable wake-up system. An alarm clock or clock radio frees you from the job of being the nag and encourages self-sufficiency.

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- ◆ Limit traffic and potential conflict in the bathroom by staggering wake-up times. Pre-teens and teens, which take more time showering and grooming, should get up earlier. Younger children can bathe the evening before to reduce bathroom congestion.
- ◆ Buy neat, comfortable clothing that children can manage dressing with on their own. Give children some choice regarding clothing to reduce some of their resistance to getting dressed.
- ◆ Allow enough time for children to dress, wash, comb their hair, brush their teeth and eat breakfast. Try not to rush children through the morning routine.
- ◆ Use charts or checklists to motivate children to take responsibility for their daily morning routine. For a child who has a lot of difficulty paying attention or following directions, you may want to offer a small reward if he is on time every day for one week (or more).
- ◆ Avoid turning on the television. Children can waste a lot of time watching television or playing. These activities should be permitted only if and when children are completely ready for school.
- ◆ Don't skip breakfast. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Research shows that children perform better in school when they eat a nutritious breakfast. A hungry child will be thinking about lunch - not about math or science.
- ◆ Remind young children to use the bathroom just before leaving for school. Most children do not like to use the school bathroom. Some even prefer to remain uncomfortable rather than use it.
- ◆ Kiss your children goodbye and wish them a good day. This is important every day but particularly if you have had "one of those mornings." It only takes three seconds and it means so much to your children (even though they never mention it). Knowing that you care gives them confidence and a sense of well-being - characteristics that enhance performance and the ability to learn.

Source: Tim Jahn, Human Development Specialist, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County; adapted from an article in the Home Economics Newsletter, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Westchester County. **Parent Pages** was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.