

[IMAGE]

Stress-Free School Year (for You and Your Children)

By Editorial Staff

We're a little more than a month into the new school year and for many, the idle, carefree days of summer seem like a distant memory. With school comes hectic schedules, meal planning, homework and a variety of other tasks that can heap considerable stress on children and parents alike. That's bad news because as we all know, stress isn't healthy, particularly if you don't know how to handle it. Here are some common school-year stress triggers and how to deal with them:

1. Prep for Success: One of the best ways to avoid feeling overwhelmed during the school year is to *prepare*. After all, a little advance work on the back end will save you considerable stress on the front end. The best example when it comes to the school year is probably meal planning. Spending an hour or so on a Sunday afternoon preparing dinner staples (pasta, rice, chicken, vegetables, etc.) will give you peace of mind the whole week long. Imagine the piece of mind you'll have as you rush home from soccer practice or music lessons at 5:30, knowing dinner is essentially ready. Just select from your pre-made options, warm and serve.

This formula holds true for school lunches, too, at least in the sense that you can outline what your kids will need for the entire week and then prep their lunches the night before. No more rushing around in the morning, grabbing less-than-healthy choices because you "don't have time" to do it right.

stress - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark *2. Stick to the Schedule:* Your kids are taught to stick to a schedule at school, whether they're following the clock in their classroom to know when one activity ends and the next begins (younger kids in a single class), or going from classroom to classroom throughout the day (older kids). Once they get home, it's your job to keep them on a schedule, too – for their sanity and yours. Teach them to organize and prioritize and they'll be less likely to forget an assignment or have to stay up late, toiling away on a paper as their tired eyes and minds magnify their stress. Scheduling is good for you, too, of course: get through dinner, homework, brush teeth and off to bed; and then guess who'll have a little time of their own to relax and unwind? *You*.

3. Practice Patience: If there's one quality that can defuse a stressful situation, it's patience; but unfortunately, it's often the first quality to go out the window in times of stress. Ironically, the less patience you have, the more stress is created, both for you (the impatient one) and your children (the ones forced to deal with your impatience), and vice versa.

Even if you're not a patient person by design (and particularly if you're not), practice patience by developing habits that cultivate it, such as giving yourself a "time out" when you feel yourself becoming impatient (it's not just for kids); stopping whatever you or your children are doing that's creating the stressful situation for a few minutes; etc.

Perhaps the most basic way to face down impatience is to make sure you're always communicating with your children. After all, healthy conversation, even about the most difficult / stressful issues, is so much better than internalizing your stress and living with it 24/7.

4. Laugh a Little: In the manic day-to-day, week-to-week madness called the school year, it's far too easy to become a robot and run your family's life that way (see above). That might be the best way to get things done, but if you don't remember to laugh a little, you'll end up creating more stress than defusing it. Simply put, no one can feel that stressed when they're laughing. Why? Because laughter stimulates the production of "feel good" chemicals including serotonin and oxytocin.

No how stressed can you be when your body's making you feel so good? Whether it's going around the dinner table every night and giving each family member the chance to tell their "best" joke, or interrupting a particularly busy / stressful moment with an impromptu "tickle torture" session, laughter truly is the best medicine when it comes to beating stress.

5. Timing Is Everything: The first four tips have all been leading up to this one, which may be the most profound way to counter stress during the school year – and all year round. The best way to beat stress is to stop what you're doing, go off the schedule, eliminate the stress that can come even from those supposedly stress-relieving tactics, and do something completely different for awhile. Go to a movie, play a board game, take a walk around the block, coordinate a sleepover or go out to dinner. Break from the routine and appreciate that your children – and you – deserve to enjoy life.

Commit to making your family's school year more than a collection of homework assignments, car trips from point A to point B, pre-packed lunches and busy, tired mornings. Now *that's* how you ensure a

stress-free (or at least low-stress) school year!

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