



The Back to School Toolbox: Seven Strategies to Kick Off a Successful Academic Year

A Next Action Worksheet for use with the tele-seminar.

By Drs. Susan Giurleo & Allison Andrews

This worksheet is intended to briefly summarize the main concepts of in our online seminar: **The Back to School Toolbox: Seven Strategies to Kick Off a Successful Academic Year**, and follows the flow of the presentation in the matching online seminar. We have included a many practical suggestions to help you think through the concepts as they relate to your family life.

If you have not already accessed the online tele-seminar, please click on this link, enter your email and listen at your convenience:

<http://childdevelopmentpartners.com/parenting-class-library/>

A successful, less-stress academic year starts with good preparation before the bus leaves the curb and the first bell rings.

And it requires more than just getting a new box of #2 pencils and the newest sneakers all the kids are wearing.

For children with autism, ADHD, learning and sensory differences a good start to the school year begins in the weeks leading up to the big day.

In this class, we discuss the 7 tools parents need to help their children start the school year off strong.

Let's get started:

1. Preview of what's to come on the first day and week of school.

Many of our kids are starting in new schools, and most all of them have new teachers. This brings up a lot of unknown factors and some anxiety. As best you can, take some time to preview with your child what to expect on the first few days at school. For younger kids, this may involve discussing the routine of getting on and off the bus. For older, kids this may mean reminding them of the business of the hallways, or taking time to preview their schedule with them.

Previewing is an effective learning strategy. And starting a new school year requires a lot of learning. So give your child the gift of a clear, organized preview of what's to come in the new school year. They will feel much more confident as they use their new pencils.

2. Start with proper materials and have a homework and organization plan.

We know homework can feel like a long way off, and we also know that ORGANIZING homework can often be harder than the academic pieces.

Before school starts, we recommend getting the required materials for school, doubling up so you have the same materials at home, too.

Then plan out a homework routine. This includes:

- Where to do homework
- When to do homework
- How to do homework (start with hardest/easiest work, where to put "to-do" work and "all-done" work, a place to plan out long term projects, etc.)

Planning this way before school starts will save everyone a lot of stress when those full backpacks start coming home.

Homework systems can be hard to develop, especially with teens who want to be independent and in families where parents are at work during afterschool hours. To support kids who want to be in control of their homework, but need help staying organized, we have developed the Homework Survival Bootcamp. It's a 2 month online/text based program that helps kids develop solid, simple homework routines. You can learn more about [Homework Survival by clicking here](#).

3. Establish healthy sleep and eating habits.

We list this as #3, but as we said in the audio class, this is really our #1 recommended tip. If you only have the time/energy to do one thing to prepare for school, it's getting your child's sleeping and eating on a school-oriented schedule.

If your child is up late and sleeping in during summer, good for him/her! But as the school days creep closer it's important to shift that sleep schedule toward the school schedule. No one feels good going to bed at midnight and waking at 6am.

This shift can take a week or more for some kids with executive dysfunction (remember their brains don't SHIFT easily). So while other folks may be able to quickly move their sleep patterns, chances are this won't be as easy for your child with different brain wiring.

Eating

Many kids with ADHD and executive dysfunction crave carbs. We don't know why this is. However, carbs lead to sugar highs and lows that are not conducive to focus. Try to combine carbs with protein for your child in meals and snacks.

School snacks matter, too. Cheese is better than Cheese-Its. Protein is a focus food, so try to include healthy meat, yogurt, cheese, beans (hummus counts), or nuts/nut-butters (if allowed and your child can eat them).

4. Establish specific rules and schedules for screen time and extracurricular activities.

In summer we can be more relaxed about screen time. But when school starts, the schedule needs to be reset and very clear.

Back to school is a great time to re-establish rules and schedules around screens (and by screens we mean mobile phones, itouches, hand-held video games, computer time for gaming/video watching and TV).

Plan out the afterschool schedule for your kids and get it posted in a public place. A white board can be good for this, giving each kid their own color for their

activities. List after school events, as well as doctor's appointments and other things that come up.

Schedule in screen time.

As an example, write down: "Screens are ok 7 – 9pm, only after homework and showers are completed."

If you have days that are too busy for screens, note it on the master schedule.

And we highly recommend a time when all screens shut down and are plugged in where parents can see them before they head off to bed. There is no good reason for your child to be using technology after their bedtime. (remember, sleep is paramount to focus).

5. Set up streamlined morning and bedtime routines.

Morning and bedtime routines are often a sticky point for kids with ADHD, autism and executive dysfunction.

Why? Because there are many shifts in a very short period of time.

Routines are tricky to 'teach' because every family has a different schedule, needs and each child has unique skills.

That said, if your mornings or evenings feel consistently chaotic, with lots of stress, nagging and struggle, developing simple, straightforward, *consistent* routines is the key to easing the "hard."

If you feel like you have tried this before with little success, we ask that you examine how consistent the routines were at that time. The key to success is in following the same routine (developing a 'groove' if you will) over and over and over again.

People with weak EF don't easily fall into a groove, so the repetition of the SAME patterns over and over is required for them to develop some proficiency with routines over time.

This can be tricky for busy parents with resistant kids. We know your time is stretched. It can be helpful to get support to set up these successful routines.

6. Connect with team members ahead of the first day if possible.

Meeting teachers, therapists, principal, nurse before school starts is a wonderful way to start a year. We know this isn't always possible, but often the school is more accessible than we think, if we just email/call the principal and ask if we can come in the day before school starts. All the teachers are there getting ready.

It's best for these meetings to be casual and short. Just a simple introductory, "hello," find the locker, see the cubby, walk the halls and find the bathroom. This is NOT a time to "catch up" a teacher on your child's needs or changes in the household.

If you do have issues you want your child's teacher to know ahead of time, an email is probably a better mode of communication. Keep in mind, your child's new teacher will want a chance to get to know him/her before giving any feedback, so any email you send at the beginning of the school year is simply and "FYI" tool.

After 4-6 weeks, it might make sense to call the team together for some reason. That time frame gives the teachers enough time to get to know your child and his/her learning style a bit better.

7. Stay positive and realistic.

We know school often comes with stress and struggle for some of our kids. However, we know that "We get what we think," and if we think school is going to be hard and stressful, well, it will be.

Of course, be realistic. If your child struggles with reading, we don't suggest claiming ease in reading or how much 'fun' pull-out reading class will be.

But, we can balance our thinking to accommodate the fact that, while reading will be harder work, there are still good parts of school. Maybe it's social time or maybe it's the OT room or maybe it's helping in the office or the cafeteria or art or lunch bunch or the nice therapist who gives safe space to be quiet and regroup.

When we parents make an effort to take the good with the bad, our children learn a valuable lesson. Not every situation is ideal or comfortable, but we can look for the good and persevere from a place of empowerment, rather than feel like we are victims in an unwinnable struggle.

RESOURCES to help with Back-to-School:

- [Homework Survival Bootcamp](#) – for middle and high school students.
- If you are seeking support in establishing back-to-school routines, please call us for a free phone consultation - 844-370-1727.