

insights



How to get kids off to school on time without yelling, whining or constantly reminding!



by Michael Grose

Getting kids to school on time can be infuriating and anxiety-inducing for parents, especially if you work! The clock just keeps ticking and doesn't make allowances for morning meanderers. It's easy if your child is the bright-eyed, bushy-tailed type who wakes up ready and focused for school. But what if you have a child who needs time to wake up, and is easily distracted by the television, a pesky sibling or even the family pooch that wants to be patted? What if you have a child who drags the chain and wouldn't get to school without at least five parental reminders to hurry up? In these cases mornings can be chaotic and very stressful.

If you struggle with peace, harmony and getting kids focused on school these suggestions will help you make mornings run a littler smoother.

1. Prepare as much as you can the night before

It may be stating the obvious but the less that children have to do in the morning the better. So putting clothes out, preparing lunches and snacks and having school bags packed and ready the night before will mean there is less decision-making and less for everyone to worry about in the morning.

2. Identify and overcome distractions

As mentioned above, children can easily be distracted before school. If possible remove distractors such as televisions and digital devices. Allow them when everyone is ready for school. Minimise the impact of other distractions such as managing argumentative siblings. Stay out of these arguments as your attention usually just inflames sibling disputes. Be liberal with encouragement, affection and once-only reminders in the morning and minimise conflict resolution, arguments and angry words.

3. Make your morning routine visual

If, for whatever reason, your child randomly and dreamily wanders from one activity to another then consider placing a sequenced photo chart of 4 or 5 main activities (e.g. wake up, breakfast, get dressed, chores, pack bags) in a prominent place that he or she can refer to each morning. This visual prompt will help put some routine into your child's morning, as well as reduce their dependence on you.



4. Delegate some responsibility

Consider delegating the job of keeping a wayward child on track to a capable, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed sibling. Let me explain. If you come from a family of four or more children then there is a reasonable chance that either you or a sibling took charge of many aspects of the family routine, including getting kids up each morning and off to school. This is not so much a case of parents neglecting their responsibilities but rather letting go of the minutiae of management. When this happens a capable and caring child will generally fill the parental void. Alternatively, a parent may purposefully give that job to a child. Either way, delegation is a great way of instilling parenting skills into the next generation as well as keeping children from being dependent on their parents.

5. Make yourself scarce

If you find it impossible to ignore your child's morning meanderings or misbehaviours, or if you think that there is no way your child would get to school without your timely reminders then try keeping yourself busy. Get yourself ready for the day and give your children the space to work things out themselves. You may be surprised how capable your child is, when no one reminds him or her of their responsibilities. **A word of warning:** Your child may test out your resolve by doing very little to get him or herself ready. If so, be prepared to give the next idea a go.

6. Be willing to take your child to school even if they aren't fully ready

If keeping up appearances is important then you will struggle with this idea, but bear with me. Your job as a parent is to shift the responsibility of getting to school to the person who should bear it – that is, your child. When you worry more about something than a child then that task becomes your responsibility. Mornings will always be stressful if you take responsibility for kids being at school on time. One way around this is to be willing to take your child to school even if they are not fully ready. It may mean your child has to hurriedly put his or her shoes and socks on in the car, or perhaps finish that piece of toast on the way to school. Doing this may make you feel like a mean parent but if you do it in a reasonable, matter-of-fact way then you are guilty of nothing more than putting a little responsibility the way of your child. Children will usually learn more from your actions than your words.

It's times such as bedtime, mealtime and mornings when children transition from one activity to another that brings so much stress for parents. Often children just want to keep doing an activity they enjoy rather than go to bed, join you at the meal table or go to school as required. It's easy to be drawn into arguments and disputes with children who don't want to play the cooperation game. It helps at these times to stick to a known routine (that may be individual for each child); to talk a little less (cue them once but no more); and be willing to put a reasonable action or consequence in place so that children take some responsibility themselves.



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