

Back To School Tips

From the American Academy of Pediatrics website: www.aap.org

Making the First Day Easier

- Remind your child that she is not the only student who is a bit uneasy about the first day of school. Teachers know that students are anxious and will make an extra effort to make sure everyone feels as comfortable as possible.
- Point out the positive aspects of starting school: It will be fun. She'll see old friends and meet new ones. Refresh her memory about previous years, when she may have returned home after the first day with high spirits because she had a good time.
- Find another child in the neighborhood with whom your youngster can walk to school or ride with on the bus.
- If you feel it is appropriate, drive your child (or walk with her) to school and pick her up on the first day.

Backpack Safety

- Choose a backpack with wide, padded shoulder straps and a padded back.
- Pack light. Organize the backpack to use all of its compartments. Pack heavier items closest to the center of the back. The backpack should never weigh more than 10 to 20 percent of the student's body weight.
- Always use both shoulder straps. Slinging a backpack over one shoulder can strain muscles. Wearing a backpack on one shoulder may also increase curvature of the spine.
- Consider a rolling backpack. This type of backpack may be a good choice for students who must tote a heavy load. Remember that rolling backpacks still must be carried up stairs.

Traveling To & From School

Review the basic rules with your youngster:

School Bus

- Wait for the bus to stop before approaching it from the curb.
- Do not move around on the bus.
- Check to see that no other traffic is coming before crossing.
- Make sure to always remain in clear view of the bus driver.

Car

- All passengers should wear a seat belt and/or an age and size appropriate car safety seat or booster seat.
- Your child should ride in a car safety seat with a harness as long as possible and then ride in a belt-positioning booster seat. Your child is ready for a booster seat when she has reached the top weight or height allowed for her seat, her shoulders are above the top harness slots, or her ears have reached the top of the seat.
- Your child should ride in a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle's seat belt fits properly (usually when the child reaches about 4'9" in height and is between 8 to 12 years of age). This means the shoulder belt lies across the middle of the chest and shoulder, not the neck or throat; the lap belt is low and snug across the thighs, not the stomach; and the child is tall enough to sit against the vehicle seat back with her legs bent at the knees and feet hanging down.
- All children under 13 years of age should ride in the rear seat of vehicles.
- Remember that many crashes occur while novice teen drivers are going to and from school. You may want to limit the number of teen passengers to prevent driver distraction. Do not allow your teen to drive while eating, drinking, or talking on a cell phone.

Bike

- Always wear a bicycle helmet, no matter how short or long the ride.
- Ride on the right, in the same direction as auto traffic.
- Use appropriate hand signals.
- Respect traffic lights and stop signs.
- Wear bright color clothing to increase visibility.
- Know the “rules of the road.”

<http://www.aap.org/family/bicycle.htm>

Walking to School

- Make sure your child’s walk to a school is a safe route with well-trained adult crossing guards at every intersection.
- Be realistic about your child’s pedestrian skills. Because small children are impulsive and less cautious around traffic, carefully consider whether or not your child is ready to walk to school without adult supervision.
- Bright colored clothing will make your child more visible to drivers.

Eating During the School Day

- Most schools regularly send schedules of cafeteria menus home. With this advance information, you can plan on packing lunch on the days when the main course is one your child prefers not to eat.
- Try to get your child’s school to stock healthy choices such as fresh fruit, low-fat dairy products, water and 100 percent fruit juice in the vending machines.
- Each 12-ounce soft drink contains approximately 10 teaspoons of sugar and 150 calories. Drinking just one can of soda a day increases a child’s risk of obesity by 60 percent. Restrict your child’s soft drink consumption.

Bullying

When Your Child is Bullied

- Help your child learn how to respond by teaching your child how to:
 1. Look the bully in the eye.

2. Stand tall and stay calm in a difficult situation.
3. Walk away.
 - Teach your child how to say in a firm voice.
 1. “I don’t like what you are doing.”
 2. “Please do NOT talk to me like that.”
 3. “Why would you say that?”
 - Teach your child when and how to ask for help.
 - Encourage your child to make friends with other children.
 - Support activities that interest your child.
 - Alert school officials to the problems and work with them on solutions.
 - Make sure an adult who knows about the bullying can watch out for your child’s safety and well-being when you cannot be there.

When Your Child is the Bully

- Be sure your child knows that bullying is never OK.
- Set firm and consistent limits on your child’s aggressive behavior.
- Be a positive role model. Show children they can get what they want without teasing, threatening or hurting someone.
- Use effective, non-physical discipline, such as loss of privileges.
- Develop practical solutions with the school principal, teachers, counselors, and parents of the children your child has bullied.

When Your Child is a Bystander

- Tell your child not to cheer on or even quietly watch bullying.
- Encourage your child to tell a trusted adult about the bullying.
- Help your child support other children who may be bullied. Encourage your child to include these children in activities.
- Encourage your child to join with others in telling bullies to stop.

Article courtesy of the American Academy of Pediatrics. For more information visit the Academy of Pediatrics website at www.aap.org