

## Getting Off To School – Making It Calm Instead Of Chaotic

by Kathy Slattengren

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Do you ever find yourself rushing around in the morning desperately trying to get your kids off to school? Feeling rushed and hassled first thing in the morning is not a good way to start a day! Unfortunately many parents and children report this is exactly how they feel in the mornings.



How can we change our behavior so that mornings feel calm instead of chaotic? It can help to take a step back and look at what needs to get done in the mornings and how we want to interact with our children.

### Adding Stress by Nagging and Ordering

One thing that adds to morning stress is when parents feel they need to give their kids lots of orders to get them out the door on time:

- "Eat your breakfast."
- "Brush your teeth."
- "Get dressed right now!"
- "Remember to bring your clarinet."

Whenever we order our kids to do something, we are setting ourselves up for a possible power struggle. We are also sending the unspoken message "You're not smart enough to think of this for yourself so I'm telling you what to do." This is not quite the message we want to be sending!

How can we stop giving orders? By turning more responsibility over to our children, we can relieve ourselves from having to police their morning routines. This can be scary as mistakes will undoubtedly be made. However, children quickly learn from their mistakes and become more competent.

Let's look at a few areas where we might be able to give our children more responsibility.

### Getting Out of Bed

The first step in any good morning routine is actually getting out of bed! If your children are capable of setting an alarm clock, they are ready to handle getting themselves out of bed on time. They may need to experiment with placing the alarm clock far enough away that they are forced to get out of bed to turn it off.

Discuss ahead of time what you will do if they don't get out of bed on time. Come into their room singing your favorite song at full volume? Remove their covers? Play the trumpet? It helps if you choose something they would prefer to avoid!

### Eating Breakfast

By age 6, most children are able to get themselves a simple breakfast like a bowl of cereal or toast. By turning the responsibility for getting breakfast over to them, you will eliminate one more area of morning stress. Your children will not starve if they miss eating breakfast!

### Packing Homework, Books and Lunch

Whose responsibility is it that children remember their homework, books, lunch and other supplies? Many

parents are tempted to make this their responsibility instead of their children's.

One mom was fed up with reminding her 5th grade son to bring his soccer equipment to school. He often responded in an irritated tone, "I know Mom, I know!" One day she decided to stop reminding him. That night she did mention to him that he might want to put his soccer supplies by his backpack to remind himself to take it in the morning. He decided not to follow her advice and left the next morning without his soccer equipment. When he got home from school that day he was upset he had to practice without his equipment. However, that was the last time he forgot!

By giving our kids responsibility for remembering what they need to bring to school, they actually learn to be responsible. If they do need help remembering, we can work with them to create a checklist that they can use as a reference.

### **Getting Dressed**

A mom in one of my parenting classes asked if her 4-year-old son was really capable of getting dressed by himself. Most mornings she'd find him jumping on his bed instead of getting dressed. The other parents in the class quickly told her he most definitely was capable of getting dressed at that age!

This mom solved the problem by giving her son a choice of getting dressed at home or at preschool. It only took one time of getting dressed at preschool before he decided he'd rather get dressed at home.

### **Planning Ahead**

Start teaching your children now whatever skills they'll need for their school morning routines. If you typically do something for them like getting breakfast, expect some resistance as you turn this new responsibility over to them. Focus on helping them learn these new skills and resist the urge to jump in and do it for them.

By turning more responsibility for the morning routine over to our children, they learn that they are capable and competent. This is a great lesson for any child!

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