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Getting back to school

In my family, going from lazy summer days to rushing around in the morning and getting to school on time can be a major shock. But there are ways we can make things go more smoothly as our families adjust:

To help with morning wake up, figure out what time school starts and then count back about 9-10 hours, depending on their age. That should be the time they are going to sleep. Make bedtime about 20 minutes earlier to allow for pajamas, teeth brushing and a story before settling down.

Once bedtime is established, try to shut down all screens for 30 minutes before. Research states that light from our devices suppresses melatonin, alerting the brain to think it is still daytime. Also, the stimulation from interacting with a screen makes it harder for our brains to relax and settle into slumber.

If getting up in the morning is a struggle, remember that as long as we take responsibility for getting our children out of bed, they will let us do it.

After the first few days of school, if your child is having a hard time getting up and getting ready, have a conversation with them, at an alternate time.

Say something like, "You and I have a hard time in the morning. I am no longer going to fight with you about getting up on time. I'll give you one wakeup call and then it's up to you. If you're late, there may be consequences at school but there will also be consequences here."

Consider contacting the school and asking them to address the lateness with a consequence. At home, have a conversation with your child that TV, video game, cell phone time — or anything that will matter to them — will be taken away for a certain amount of time. They can earn these back by being on time three mornings in a row.

Reassess family roles by considering what new responsibilities and privileges your child is ready to handle.

Perhaps your first graders are old enough to get dressed by themselves and they may also be old enough to choose what snacks they would like in their lunchbox.

Maybe your fourth graders can make their own lunch but they can also earn the freedom to ride their bike to and from school on their own.

Or maybe this is the year your teenagers can take the car to school but they can

also start to do their own laundry. [College is coming]

If homework is a struggle, figure out whether your child can do it right away or needs some decompression time. Parents tend to organize their kids based on their own organization style. Doing homework right away may work for you, but it may not work for your child. Whether or not you give them some down time, enforce a "no electronics, no

distractions" rule. They can do something active or have a snack, but there are no screens until homework is done.

No matter what, remember that another school year is not just "another school year." It is a symbol of our kids getting older and moving on. So enjoy the bedtime books, the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, the Saturday morning pancakes and the giggles before they are

gone and our kids are heading off in carpools instead of heading to the swimming pool with us.

Another school year means getting back into a routine. But it also means our kids are growing up and we don't want to miss it!

For more information or a list of local licensed professionals, contact Coastal Community Counseling Resources at 732-612-3148.