

THE POWER OF A FRESH START

As a child I had a love/hate relationship with returning to school after summer break. I loved getting a new outfit, the smell of a fresh box of crayons, and the feel of a brand new pad of paper. Growing up on a farm, summer meant infrequent visits with my friends, so September brought renewed social engagements and the potential seemed endless. I loved the excitement of finding out who was in my homeroom and who my teacher would be. I loved the lunch items my mom would have stocked in our fridge and pantry. I loved the new resolutions I would make for myself, such as: I will have my lunch and clothes ready the night before, complete my homework early, achieve honors, be brave and try-out for the school team or drama production, etc. On the other side of the coin, I hated to say goodbye to my dog and my horse, not being able to sleep in, and not having my evenings free to play and watch TV. I hated the thought of getting on the school bus in the cold and the dark, and the thought that I might have that bothersome kid in my class or the teacher that yells.

Now, as a mom of four, I continue to have a love/hate with back to school. I love getting my family back on schedule, I love the excitement on the kids' faces when we find that "perfect" outfit, I love not having to listen to the kids bicker from the moment their eyes open, not hollering for the 567th time to "Shut Off Fortnite! You have been playing for 36 hours straight!" I love not planning activities and chores to keep the kids entertained and off their electronics, I love the new resolutions we plan as a family: pack lunches the night before, go to bed early, have an organized homework schedule, etc. I love the promises of new heights my children will soar in the school year and goals they will accomplish. But, alas... I hate the end of the long, warm, quiet days. I hate the panic I feel trying to organize all their school supplies and signing the 6000 forms. I hate spending \$28, 425 on school clothes! I hate watching our family calendar quickly fill up and over flow. I hate the tightness in my throat and the stinging in my eyes as I wave goodbye to each one, knowing they're not so little anymore

I am not alone when it comes to the stress and anxiety I feel preparing for back to school. According to Parents Magazine, September 2017 by Amanda First "

***48%** of moms say they're extremely concerned about **managing their family's schedules** once school starts. **86%** are worried about the **quality and healthfulness** of their children's school lunches. **94%** say protecting their children from **bullying** is a major back-to-school concern. **47%** find it difficult to fit in **quality time** with the whole family once school starts. **4 out of 5** of moms see back-to-school as a chance for a **fresh start**, not just for their kids but for themselves as well. **69%** of moms are concerned about their children's **academic performance**. More than half (**58%**) of moms worry about **staying on budget** for back-to-school shopping. **82%** of moms say back-to-school season is their **biggest shopping time** of the year.*

How can we be realistic on our expectations and embrace the power of a fresh start?

- Talk with your family about goals for the upcoming school year with practical, simple steps that will help your family succeed in accomplishing them. WRITE THEM DOWN, then post them where you can all see it daily.

- Even if you don't have your kids back to a normal bedtime routine, its ok! Everyone will eventually adjust.
- Set a budget for school supplies and schools: not everything needs to be purchased right away. It's all right to buy supplies as you can afford them.
- Have an ongoing list on your phone or a notepad that is accessible of what needs to be completed before school begins
- Keep extra-curricular activities to a minimum. Our family rule is 1 activity per child per semester.
- Take pictures! Who cares if your child is scowling, or their hair is sticking up or their shirt miss-buttoned. It only adds character.
- Remember your sense of humor and go easy on yourself (and your kids!) It's a stressful time for everyone: school staff, kids and parents.
- Don't compare yourself to the posts on social media of the seemingly "perfect families" on the first day of school. You never know what happens behind closed doors. We all lose it, some are just better at hiding it than others!

This article was submitted by Tammy Charko BA, BSW, RSW. Tammy is Northern Gateway Public School's Student Support Facilitator. She is a support for schools, students, parents and caregivers to encourage success in school. Tammy advocates for students and provides a link between the student and other supports within the community. Tammy has been a social worker for nearly 20 years and is a mother to 4 children, 3 of which are teenagers.

Timeline of a School Morning

©Adrienne Hedger

Hedger Humor

Gently wake children.



Switch to yelling.



Manage drama related to outfit and hair issues.

Look for missing shoes.



Deal with emergency.



Look for your coffee.



Realize you're running late.



Be informed that you're supposed to bring a snack to class, fill out eight critical forms NOW, and a shoe is *still* missing.

