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**Back-to-School Tips for Working Parents**

It’s back-to-school time—controlled chaos begins! Not only are you rushing around to find the perfect lunch box along with seven dry-erase markers in specific colors, the exact brand of scissors, glue, and the elusive three-ring notebook with two pockets and four dividers, but you’re also trying to make the most of what’s left of summer. The end of summer and the start of the new school year can bring stress, guilt, and impossible choices to find childcare that fits your work schedule. It is also an exciting time for kids and parents alike. Below are some tips on how to start the school year off on the right foot and establish a solid base for an enjoyable school year.

**Preparing for the start of the school year:**

* For younger children, talk to them about what they should expect to experience during the school day. Make it fun by pretending to be the teacher and go over expectations such as raising hands, not talking when the teacher is talking, and practice circle time, recess rules, and help them understand the length of their day.
* Make sure your children understand pick-up and drop-off procedures.
* Let your child help with selecting school supplies.
* Play dress up putting school outfits together. This will help children know what is appropriate to wear to school and will assist you in knowing what you need to shop for.
* If your child will have a locker, get their lock and have them practice opening it.
* One of the most impactful steps you can take to ensure success with minimal stress is to establish routine. This is true for all school aged children. Research studies have shown that routines help with the development of self-regulation, healthy sleeping patterns, academic achievement, and general social adjustment. You should start implementing back-to-school routines at least a week before school begins, beginning with a set wake-up and bedtime. Remember consistency is the key to a successful routine.
* Middle and high school students may worry about finding their classes, fitting in, bullying, and teacher expectations. Start the conversation before school begins.
* Download a copy of the school calendar so you can anticipate and prepare for holidays, teacher in-service days, testing days, etc.

**When the school year begins:**

* Have your child lay their clothes out the night before. You can make this fun by having them check the weather, so they are dressed appropriately.
* Ensure backpacks with all necessary items for the next day are put together and placed by the door.
* Ask the teacher for the schedule of special classes such as gym, art, library, and music so you can help them be prepared.
* Stay connected during the day by writing notes or a funny joke and placing it in their lunch. You can also make special friendship bracelets to wear so they have a reminder that you are with them always.
* Maximize your after-school time by establishing a routine such as having a light snack followed by 30 minutes of free time. Sit down with your children (without your phone) and ask them about their day. Then together go through their take home folder and read any notes sent home, sign any forms that need to be returned and review their daily work. This will naturally lead to homework time.
* Try and have dinner as a family around the same time every evening. Follow this with free time for play before you start the next day prep and bedtime routine.

Be flexible with your schedule as things will pop up. However, life will be less chaotic if you set the foundation and follow through with your routine until your household is running like a well-oiled machine. Remember it’s not about the quantity of time you spend with your children; it’s about the **quality** of time. All they need is to feel loved, seen, and supported. Be present for them and watch them blossom into amazing human beings.

