Nashoba Community Partnership for Children

parent pages

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From Chaos to Calm in the Morning

Mornings can be stressful! You're trying to get yourself and your children out of bed, dressed, fed, and out the door on time. It's challenging, but sticking to a consistent routine and preparing for, and even anticipating, a few problems will help tremendously. The goal is to stop the morning madness, and it is possible.

There are no magic solutions, but there are things you can do to transform this potentially chaotic time into a calmer, more enjoyable experience for the family.

- Make sure everyone (that includes you) gets enough sleep! It requires a lot of stamina to deal with life's everyday expectations.
- Empower children to wake up on their own by setting a special alarm clock for them. This may be less irritating than you standing over them urging them to get up.
- Give each child a couple minutes of cuddle time when they first wake up, to set a nurturing tone for the morning routine.
- Prepare whatever you can the night before, such as breakfasts, lunches, and clothing options.
- Have a specific chair or shelf for backpacks, diaper bags, shoes, lunch boxes, and jackets so you can find them easily in the morning.
- Set your alarm for 15 to 30 minutes before your children wake up so that you have some time to get ready.
- Load items in the car ahead of time if possible—school projects, show-and-tell, extra clothes, and signed permission slips.
- Create a morning routine chart (with pictures for young children) reminding them of all the things they need to accomplish—eating breakfast, brushing teeth, getting dressed, combing hair.
- Play music your child responds to. Music has a way of turning low energy into high energy quickly. You can even create a playlist that cues them to a specific task. When a certain song comes on, they should be brushing their teeth; when the next song comes on, they should be putting on their shoes.
- Let children play with toys or read books only after they're dressed and ready to go.
- Lighten things up when you can. "I bet you a back rub that I can get ready faster than you" or "Can you put on your shoes before the toast pops up?"

Stress is contagious, and children feel it when parents rush around. They will also mirror your actions: If you yell and lose your cool, you'll probably see similar behaviors from them.

Different ages of children present different problems in the morning. A toddler may throw a tantrum at the worst possible moment, a preschooler may begin to feel separation anxiety even before getting into the car, and school-agers may be frantically looking for lost homework. You'll have more time to tackle these inevitable problems if you already have matching shoes on and car keys in hand!

Hang in there. Once you can breeze through the mornings, you'll be able (and willing!) to think about what's for dinner.

Press and Print

Kids love to make prints. The repetitive motion is satisfying, and the layers of colors and shapes always offer a surprise.

• Make a stamp pad by placing folded wet paper towels on a cookie sheet. • Pour a layer of paint onto the paper towels.

• Collect cookie cutters, cotton swabs, sponges (cut into shapes), paper cups, toothbrushes, and kitchen gadgets.

• Let your child press objects onto the pad and stamp it onto a sheet of paper.

• They can keep stamping with the same object or pick a different object and follow the same process. These prints are a welcome addition to your art collection.

Timely Tip for Healthy Snacking

Children like and need to snack between meals, but making them healthy is key. Here are three suggestions.

* Grab-and-go snacks are favorites with children. Choose cheese, crackers, baby carrots, fruit, veggie sticks, and nut butters.

* Pop your own popcorn and, instead of butter, sprinkle some grated cheese or an herb mix on top.

* Make smoothies from yogurt, frozen fruit, and a splash of fruit juice.

Ice Cream in a Bag

It only takes 10 minutes and a few ingredients to make single servings of delicious ice cream.

What you need:

½ cup half-and-half
½ tsp. vanilla
1 Tbsp. sugar
1 zip-locked sandwich bag
3 to 4 cups crushed ice
1/3 cup salt
1 zip-locked gallon-size bag

Instructions:

Put the half-and-half, vanilla, and sugar in the sandwich bag. Zip it up tight so it won't leak. Place the ice and salt in the gallon-size bag. Then place the sandwich bag inside and seal it tightly. Now for the fun part: Squeeze or shake the bag for about 10 minutes until the ice cream ingredients thicken. Put your ice cream in a bowl or eat it straight from the bag. Yummy!

Don't Help Germs—Finish Them Off!

If your doctor has prescribed an antibiotic for your child, it's important that your child finishes the dose. If symptoms subside or go away, it might be tempting to stop the meds, but don't. Lingering germs can develop a resistance and become even harder to get rid of!

They Like to Move !

Watch kids. They run and jump, fidget and squirm. Help them get the wiggles out with this easy indoor activity.

Balancing Act

Put masking tape on the floor in a straight line, circle, rectangle, trangle, or a zigzag pattern. Have children follow the design with their feet. Ask them to tiptoe, run, skip, and hop to the end of the tape. Next ask them to use their bodies, but not their feet, to move along the tape. They can try crawling on their knees, slithering on their tummies, and scooting on their bottoms. They will come up with other ideas, too.

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KeepTheToy Patrol Away!

Even patient parents find themselves frustrated and angry when piles of toys are scattered everywhere. Toy overload can transform you into the dreaded "Toy Patrol" that threatens to banish or give away toys and say things like "We're never getting another toy until this mess is cleaned up!" But the toys keep multiplying, creeping out of your child's room and eventually finding a resting place in the kitchen, living room, and hallway.

You've probably been tempted to throw up your hands and say, "It's easier to just clean it up myself!" But that strategy backfires because children (even the little ones) need to take responsibility for their stuff. They may grumble at first, but children can see that an organized space invites play. The checker pieces are in the checker box, the dolls are dressed, and even the stuffed animals and electronic gadgets have a home. An added bonus to an organized space is that the kids actually have room to play!

Before you begin this cleanup process, gather some containers or boxes and label them for sorting:

Toy Hospital: The headless doll and torn book belong in this box. At a later date, the repairs can begin.

Throwaway Pile: If toys are hopelessly broken, place them in this box headed for the trash can.

Find a Home: Anything that is not a toy or art project can be placed in this container—kids' clothing, random measuring spoons, the dog's brush. These items can be sorted and returned to their proper place after order is restored.

Store It for Later: Some toys are no longer played with but are too valuable or too sentimental to be given away. Place them in this box and put it away in a safe place.

Giveaway: Children have a lot of compassion, and while they won't want to give away their favorite playthings, they will be inclined to pass along toys they no longer enjoy and that other children will treasure. This box may also contain toys that can be swapped with friends.

Toy Rotation: Some toys—such as games, puzzles, and art supplies—can be put away for a period of time. When these items are reintroduced, they are fresh and may present new challenges.

Start with a Plan and Make It Fun

Once the crayons, puzzles, and doll clothes have been picked up, given away, or hauled to the garbage can, it's time to organize. And it can be fun.

* Pizza After Pickup Party *

- Plan a **"Pizza After Pickup Party"** for added motivation!
- Provide creative storage spaces, such as hammocks hung from the ceiling for stuffed animals. Over-the-door shoe holders (with see-through shoe pockets) work well for things such as LEGOs and art supplies. Laundry baskets are perfect for large items such as train tracks and basketballs.
- Kids love mastering their colors, numbers, and shapes. Ask them to dig into the box and find places in their room for three red things, two round things, etc.
- Place labels with words or pictures (for younger children) on shelves or drawers to help children store toys in their proper place.
- Choose a secret toy that only you know about, and tell your child that when that toy is picked up, you will hoot and holler and do a happy dance. This works best if the "secret" toy is not found until the end of organizing is in sight!