

Mom's School Survival Guide

Organizational strategies for ADD mothers of ADD kids. **BY SANDY MAYNARD**



If you're a mom with ADD, the words "back to school" can make you quiver with anxiety. They elicit visions of endless papers to sign, car pools to remember, and homework

assignments to help with. Also, you may have an ADD child who has organizational problems of his own.

If I had only one piece of advice to give you, it would be this: Start preparing early (meaning now). With that going for you, along with the following organizing ideas, you'll be ready for the responsibilities the new school year brings. But

don't tackle this checklist alone. Make back-to-school prep a family affair, and everyone wins!

The Internal Clock

During the summer, most of us let our kids stay up later and sleep longer. Now's the time to coax your kids back into their early-to-bed, early-to-rise routine. By

transitioning ahead of time, you'll make it easier for your child to rise and, more importantly, shine during that first week of school. In addition, set your own clock at least 15 minutes ahead of the kids', to give yourself a bit of quiet time to get ready for the day.

Survival perk: Once your child's body clock has adjusted, he'll be more likely to get up without your help (OK, with a little help). This allows you to attend to other things, like getting dressed yourself, and making a healthy breakfast.

The Ultimate Planner

Post-it notes are good reminders, but they don't cut it when it comes to day-to-day organization. You'll need important dates, times, and contact information all in one place. Enter the essential personal planner—your all-in-one phonebook, calendar, and to-do list. When your child's school calendar arrives, enter all of the holidays, vacations, and half-days. Then note the dates and times for practices, games, and performances. Don't forget contact information for coaches and teachers.

It's not all up to you, Mom. Buy each child her own planner, and have her set it up just as you've set up yours. Even if she knows she is to walk the neighbor's dog tomorrow at 3 p.m., she should write it down anyway—especially if she has ADD. Day planners help kids organize independently—a skill they can use all their lives.

Survival perk: If everyone's keeping track of the family schedule, there will be fewer interruptions for you. When your child asks, "When's the next holiday?" you can answer, "Look it up in your planner."

Survival in a Hurry!

- >> Get your kids back to school-time bedtimes—*before* school starts.
- >> Create an all-in-one planner, noting school holidays, car pools, extracurricular events, and contact info for coaches, teachers, and troop leaders.
- >> Clean out the closets now to reduce clutter (and stress) and make room for new school clothes.
- >> Set up a home office to be your "control central," where important papers are organized in one place.
- >> Conduct a pre-first-day morning routine trial run.
- >> Let go of guilt—you don't have to be perfect, just a caring mom.

Closets, Clothes, and More

Closets, dressers, and everything inside of them are probably the last things you want to think about, but now is the ideal time to purge the kids' fashion inventory. It's their stuff, so get them involved. Drawer by

drawer, hanger by hanger, look at each item of clothing together, saving what fits and discarding what doesn't. As your kids sort, have them make a list of what clothing they need to start the year.

Survival perk: Armed with an early shopping list, you can hit late-summer sales and avoid overloading yourself with back-to-school tasks come September. Shopping hint: Kids don't need as much as they think they do—nor do their closets.

The Right Study Space

It's time to determine where your kids can study—and where they can't. If you use your dining room table for meals, your kids need to set up shop someplace else. If your child has a desk in his bedroom, help him get it ready (clear it off, put up a lamp, buy supplies) before school starts. Any quiet area with good lighting and a writing surface can make a study space—as long as it's out of TV earshot. Once you've picked one, make sure your child knows where his supplies go so he can put them away each day [see the portable-office tip on page 38].

Survival perk: Establishing a place and routine for homework makes completing assignments your child's responsibility—not yours. [For more on this, see "Homework 101" on page 39.] When his papers go to a neat, organized spot, they save *your* space and *your* energy.

Manageable Mornings

"Where's my backpack?" "Hurry up!" "Oh no, I overslept!" For many families, mornings are the most hectic part of day. Now's the time—before school starts—to establish a smooth morning routine. Do a dry run. Talk with each child about what he needs to do each morning, and go over the order of tasks. What time do you need to start getting dressed? Who's walking the dog? What's the bottom-line out-the-door time? Make a list of morning tasks and post it where everyone can see it.

Survival perk: When families divide up the work, less falls on your shoulders, which will help you get everyone out the door on time. The to-do list lets you see what might be done the night before to further your morning ease.

Your Territory

Whether you stay at home or work outside the home, you're the CEO of your household. And every CEO needs an office. Take over that spare bedroom or clear out the alcove under the stairs, but pick a spot and make it yours. Think of your space as "control central," from which you run the household. Splurge! Buy a laptop and a desk. (If your budget is tight, make do with a card table and a used computer.) Make sure your corner has a phone or cable jack so you can e-mail and shop online—real time-savers. Set up an in-box for papers to be signed and returned to school.

Maintain your office strictly for important child- and home-related documents. Keep a separate file for each child: health records, psychological test evaluations, report cards, birth certificates, and passports. Files for current projects, like an Individualized Educational Program (IEP), can stay on top of your desk, but try to contain the kinds of papers that magically grow. Invest in plastic file folders that hold papers neatly in view.

Survival perk: No more searching for lost bills, household papers, and documents about your kids. You have everything where you need it, when you need it.

Guilt Busting

ADD moms aren't neurobiologically wired to be perfect. Even with our best efforts, there will be times when we show up late or forget to bake the cookies. Apologize, get over it, and move on.

Survival perk: Moving on means moving forward. Show your love for your kids with plenty of hugs, no matter how frantic the school year gets. You'll enjoy the ride, even if the road is a little bumpy.

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Getting ready for school? Tell us what works for you.

Send your back-to-school survival tips to *ADDitude*, 42 West 38 Street, Suite 901, New York, NY 10018, or email letters@additudemag.com.