

GEARING UP FOR THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I was always excited to get back to school after vacation. I missed my friends and couldn't wait to hear and share all the things that happened since we last saw each other. It was a big transition starting a new year. We had to buy new schoolbooks and, sometimes, a new uniform. We always had a new teacher and often, new students in the class. It was a completely new start each year.

While I always found it exciting to get back to school, I know that change for many children can be scary. It is the fear of the unknown, wondering if they will live up to both parent and teacher expectations. I recall my first experience with one high school teacher. She marched into our class, looked scathingly around and almost shouted at us, "This room is a shambles! Put all your bags beside your desks so the aisles are clear. Stop talking! I will go out and come in again and we will start the class again." We all stared at one another in shock. Miss Brown turned out to be a very good teacher, but this was her way of establishing authority.

It is important to prepare your child for when they start school, experience a new teacher and/or has to follow different routines. At least a week before school starts, make sure they have all their stationery, school clothing and a weekly home routine worked out. Discuss your expectations of them. Don't just expect them to follow a timetable. When they know why they need to keep to a routine they are more likely to comply. The timetable should include their time to get up, times for meals, time for homework, time for play, time for chores and time for bed. A week before school starts ensure they start going to bed early and wake up earlier to get them used to 'the reality of a school year'. There should be a time set for relaxation when they first get home from school, but no TV as this tends to suck them into a program they won't want to stop watching.

Once your child has started school, watch carefully to make sure they are settled and happy. They have much to contend with in those first few weeks. They are finding their place in the class, learning new material, getting used to a new teacher and new friends. Your liaison with the school is very important. Ensure you attend all parent teacher appointments. It is disappointing to see how quickly parent attendance at school functions diminishes through the grades. For the sake of your child maintain a close relationship with the school right through their educational development. Email their teacher regularly regarding your child's academic progress and behavior. Take a keen interest in what your child is learning. Plan to volunteer in the classroom one day per semester. Help your child research their subjects and ensure they finish their homework. Don't do it for them! Ensure they don't procrastinate on starting assignments and ensure they finish vacation projects.

The most important thing of all is to encourage your children with their efforts at school. There is only one person who can be 'top of the class'. Their best effort is the most you can expect. Celebrate their achievements whatever they are. And support them through their disappointments. Success at school will set your child up for the rest of his/her life. Take it seriously.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.