



FALL - BACK TO SCHOOL

Start S.M.A.R.T.



Summer seems to fly by and then we are caught up in the whirlwind of school activities. Fall brings many things that are competing for our children's attention: sports, clubs, music lessons, homework (to name a few). With new exciting opportunities, it is easy to overbook, setting the stage for September whiplash and October burn-out. Here is a great acronym to help you plan a S.M.A.R.T. school schedule and a fabulous fall for your family:

S: Say yes to the BEST and no to the rest!



Activity overload doesn't benefit anyone. Allow one or two extra activities per week per child. You can't do it all and neither should your kids think they can. Limiting extracurricular activities involves tough choices and perhaps letting some good opportunities go. Help your child focus on one or two interests, rather than spreading themselves too thin. This way they will have a better chance of enjoying the activities that they are in.

M: Make downtime real time.



Schedule a short block of time between school and activities for a snack and a time to change gears. Spend this time to check in, talk about what was the best and worst part of their school day. This time will make them feel that they are being heard, loved and supported and not just being whisked to the "next" activity.

A: Allow one-on-one times together.



Outside activities, as wonderful as they are, should never completely replace one-on-one times with mom or dad. Set aside 30 minutes to one hour each week per child with just mom or dad: Go for a walk, play catch or a board game, read a book together. As it becomes a regular part of the schedule, your children will feel valued and important. Building intimacy through intentional time will reap great rewards. This will not only benefit your child but you as well!

R: Re-evaluate and adjust as necessary.



Even after careful thought, you may find things don't work out as planned. Signing up for soccer seemed like a good idea in early fall, but by midseason it may cause more stress that it's worth. You have a choice. Either push involvement or withdraw your participation (even if you have paid fees and for the uniform). Being flexible will sometimes require choosing your battles for the sake of harmony and your child's best interests.

T: Talk to God about it.



You will have more peace when you invite God into your decision making. Ask God for his direction or redirection to help you find balance and choose the best course for your child and will best bless your family. He never lets us down.

➤ **CHECK OUT PAGE TWO FOR IDEAS TO HELP CHILDREN MANAGE STRESS**

HELPING YOUR CHILD MANAGE STRESS



The beginning of the school year brings new friends, new teachers, and new things to learn, but starting school can also bring stress. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that up to 25% of children struggle with anxiety and/or stress. Here are a few ways that you can help your child manage stress:

WATCH FOR SIGNS OF STRESS: If your child is expressing many worries, having trouble sleeping, becoming too easily frustrated or reporting many symptoms such as headaches and stomachaches without an apparent physical cause, he or she might need help managing stress.

AVOID OVERSCHEDULING. Encourage your child to choose one (for elementary-aged children) or two (for junior high students) extracurricular activities. Help them to choose something they are especially interested in or show talent in, rather than sing them up for every sport and activity because they want to be in every thing their friends/classmates are in.

STAY IN COMMUNICATION WITH TEACHERS. Let them know when your child is feeling overwhelmed with the amount or type of homework. He or she might not be the only one, and this information is sometimes helpful for teachers in knowing when to adjust their expectation, as well as, hearing feedback from your child's teacher how you can best support your child in certain subjects.

MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD IS GETTING ENOUGH REST. It is recommended that children ages 6-12 have at least 9-12 hours of sleep each night (8-10 for teens). Many children are chronically sleep deprived, making them much more susceptible to the effect of everyday stressors. Quality and consistency of sleep is also important. Sleep experts recommend a consistent routine that includes going to bed and waking at the same time each day, avoiding caffeine and turning off all electronics at least an hour before bedtime.

COACH YOUR CHILD IN EFFECTIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS. Instead of telling children what to do, we can help them develop the skills to cope with problems by coaching them through simple steps. One technique is called "1-2-3-Check." Step 1 is to ask yourself, "What is the problem?" Step 2 is to ask, "What are my choices?" Here, brainstorm all possible choices. Step 3, "Take the best action." Lastly, "Check and see how did it work." If worked well – great, if it did not reassess "What are my choices?" in step 2 and choose another alternative.

LIMIT PHONE TIME: The number one stressor our children are facing today is unlimited usage of their cell phones. Children that have time limits set for them concerning their cell phones are less stressed and over all happier. It is suggested that you have a recharging dock that is NOT in your child's bedroom and have a rule that the cell phone needs to be docked by 8:30 pm and is not touched again until morning. This may be a challenging habit to begin but the payoff is huge!

LET YOUR CHILD KNOW THEY ARE NOT ALONE. Tell them they can always come to you for support when needed, and they can also take their needs to God. Pray with your children about problems and stressors they are facing. A good scripture to print and put on their bedside is, "I can do all things through God who gives me strength." (Phil 4:13)