



Back to School

Staying Safe on the Way to School

Whether your child walks, rides a bike, takes the bus or drives themselves to school, getting there safely is always the top priority.

Each method of transportation comes with its own set of challenges, especially as routines change, traffic increases and daylight shifts with the seasons.

By taking time to review safety basics and encourage smart habits, families can start the school year with confidence and peace of mind.

WALKERS AND BIKERS

If your child walks to school, make sure they know the safest route and stick to it. Sidewalks, crosswalks and crossing guards should always be part of the plan. Practice the route together a few times before the first day, pointing out intersections and reminding them to look both ways before crossing.

For bikers, helmets are a must, no exceptions. Check the bike is the right size and in good condition, with working brakes and reflectors. Encourage kids to ride in single file and follow all traffic signs. Bright or reflective clothing can help them stay visible, especially on cloudy mornings or shorter fall days.

Avoid distractions like phones or headphones, which



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can take eyes and ears off the road. Teach kids to stay aware of their surroundings and to walk or bike with friends whenever possible.

BUS RIDERS

The school bus is one of the safest ways for students to travel, but it's important to follow the rules both on and off the bus. Remind kids to stand back from the curb while waiting and to only approach the bus when it comes to a complete stop. If they need to cross the street

in front of the bus, they should make eye contact with the driver and wait for a signal before stepping out.

Onboard, kids should stay seated, keep aisles clear and speak quietly so the driver can concentrate. Backpacks should be zipped and kept out of the walkway to avoid tripping.

For younger riders, consider a backpack tag with emergency contact information and review bus stop behavior with them frequently.

TEEN DRIVERS

For families with new drivers, the start of the school year is a great time to reinforce safe driving habits. Teens should always buckle up, obey speed limits and eliminate distractions, especially phones.

Make sure your teen knows the school's traffic flow, drop-off zones and parking rules. Encourage them to leave early enough to avoid rushing and to check the weather before leaving each morning. Parents can also set clear

expectations through a driving agreement that covers curfews, passenger limits and consequences for unsafe behavior.

SAFE HABITS START AT HOME

Talking regularly about safety — and modeling it as adults — goes a long way in helping kids develop good habits that last. A few simple reminders can make a big difference in helping students of all ages arrive safely and start their day with confidence.

Difficult Conversations

It's a conversation no parent ever wants to have, but one many families are facing: talking to kids about gun violence, especially in the context of school safety drills.

With active shooter drills now a routine part of school preparedness, children are exposed to the reality of threats, sometimes before they fully understand them.

While it's heartbreaking, open and age-appropriate conversations can help children feel safer, more prepared and emotionally supported.

START WITH QUESTIONS AND LISTEN CLOSELY

Every child is different, and their age, temperament and exposure to news or school discussions will shape how they understand gun violence. A good place to start is by asking what they know.

Try open-ended questions like: "What do you know about the drills at school?" or "Have you heard kids or teachers talk about scary things happening?" Listen carefully to what they say, and resist the urge to jump in with too much detail too quickly.

Younger children may need reassurance that the drills are like fire drills, a way to



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practice staying safe. Older kids and teens might have more complex fears or opinions. Give them space to express themselves and validate their feelings, even if you don't have all the answers.

KEEP IT HONEST BUT AGE-APPROPRIATE

It's OK to tell children the truth: Violence in schools is rare and adults are working hard to keep them safe. Emphasize their teachers, school staff and community have plans in place, and

practicing those plans helps everyone respond better in emergencies.

Avoid graphic details, especially with younger kids, and stick to what they need to know. You might say, "Sometimes schools practice what to do in case a stranger comes in, just like we practice for fires or storms."

For teens who may be more aware of national headlines, you can acknowledge their concerns while encouraging action, whether it's staying aware, supporting kindness

among peers or participating in civic engagement if they choose.

SUPPORT EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Children may respond to these conversations with fear, sadness or even anger. Let them know it's OK to feel that way. Reassure them their safety is your top priority, and remind them of all the adults around them — parents, teachers, counselors — who are there to protect and help.

If your child seems

especially anxious, has trouble sleeping or avoids school, it may be helpful to talk with a counselor or mental health professional. Many schools have resources for students and families navigating these difficult topics.

The goal isn't to take away fear completely, but to offer comfort, facts and a sense of control. In a world that can feel unpredictable, your steady presence and honest conversation can be one of the most powerful sources of security your child has.

Supporting Your Child's Learning

When your child is stuck on a math problem, flustered by a writing assignment or overwhelmed by a science project, it's tempting to step in and take the reins.

But while helping with homework can strengthen learning, doing too much of it can send the wrong message and prevent kids from developing the skills they need to succeed on their own.

So how do parents strike the right balance? With a little strategy and a lot of patience, you can support your child's academic growth while still encouraging independence and resilience.

CREATE THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

Start by setting up a consistent homework routine and a dedicated workspace free from distractions. A well-lit table with basic supplies nearby helps kids stay focused and organized. Establishing a regular time for homework, whether right after school or after a short break, creates helpful structure.

Stay nearby during homework time, especially for younger children, but try not to hover. Let them know you're available if they need help, and check in occasionally to offer encouragement or answer questions.



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OFFER GUIDANCE, NOT ANSWERS

When your child is stuck, try guiding them to find the solution rather than jumping

in with it. Ask prompting questions like, "What do you think the next step is?" or "Can you show me how you got that answer?" Encouraging them to

explain their thinking out loud can help clarify their own understanding.

For writing assignments, you might brainstorm ideas

together or talk through the structure of a paragraph, but let them choose the words and write the sentences. For math, you can review a similar example problem without solving the one they're working on.

If your child makes a mistake, resist the urge to fix it. Teachers need to see what a student understands and where they're struggling to provide meaningful feedback.

ENCOURAGE EFFORT AND CELEBRATE PROGRESS

Focusing on the learning process — not just the end result — can build confidence and motivation. Praise your child for sticking with a tough assignment, thinking critically or using a new strategy. Let them know it's OK to make mistakes and that challenges are part of learning.

If homework time becomes a daily struggle or your child seems consistently overwhelmed, reach out to their teacher. They can offer insight into how much support is expected at home and may suggest modifications or additional resources.

Helping with homework doesn't mean having all the answers. It means being a cheerleader, a sounding board and a safe place to land when school feels hard. With the right mix of support and independence, your child can build the skills to tackle assignments with growing confidence and take pride in what they accomplish on their own.

Part-Time Jobs

For many teens, a part-time job is more than just a paycheck. It's a chance to gain independence, build confidence and develop real-world skills they'll carry into adulthood.

But when school, sports and homework are also in the mix, finding the right balance can be a challenge.

Whether your teen is considering their first job or already earning a paycheck, a thoughtful approach can make the experience both rewarding and manageable.

BENEFITS BEYOND THE BANK ACCOUNT

Part-time jobs offer valuable lessons in time management, responsibility and communication. From stocking shelves and ringing up customers to babysitting or bussing tables, teens learn how to follow instructions, work as part of a team and handle challenges professionally.

Many teens feel a sense of pride and motivation from earning their own money, especially when they start saving for big goals like a car, college or travel. It's an opportunity to explore potential careers or discover strengths they didn't know they had.

That said, school should remain the top priority. A job



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should fit around academics, not the other way around. In most cases, 10-15 hours a week is a reasonable load during the school year.

SETTING BOUNDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Before your teen applies, have an honest conversation about what they're hoping to gain from working and what they might need to give up. Will a job cut into study time or affect sleep? Could it make it harder to stay involved in extracurricular activities or

spend time with friends and family?

Talk about logistics too: transportation, safety, scheduling and how they'll manage unexpected demands like covering shifts. If they're playing a sport or participating in theater, make sure their employer knows their availability may change seasonally.

It's helpful to discuss financial expectations. Will they save part of their earnings? Contribute to certain expenses? Create a simple budget together so they

understand how quickly small purchases add up.

LEGAL AND SCHOOL CONSIDERATIONS

Most states have laws that limit how many hours teens can work during the school year. For example, younger teens may be restricted to working only a few hours on school nights. Be sure to check local labor laws and school policies before starting a job search.

Some schools offer work-study or cooperative

education programs that let students earn credits while gaining job experience. These can be great options for older teens interested in career exploration or trade skills.

Part-time jobs can be a powerful tool for growth but they work best when teens feel supported and not stretched too thin. With open communication, realistic expectations and a focus on balance, parents and teens can make the most of this important step toward adulthood.

Back-to-School Books

Whether it's a child's very first day or just a new year with new challenges, books can be powerful tools for easing back-to-school jitters and sparking excitement.

Here are some age-appropriate picks that offer comfort, encouragement and a touch of fun.

PRESCHOOL/ KINDERGARTEN

The Kissing Hand by **Audrey Penn**. A gentle story about separation anxiety, this sweet tale of a raccoon heading to school reassures young children that a parent's love stays with them wherever they go.

Maisy Goes to Preschool by **Lucy Cousins**. Colorful and upbeat, this book introduces preschool routines in a fun and friendly way with Maisy the mouse and her animal friends.

Llama Llama Misses Mama by **Anna Dewdney**. Perfect for nervous little ones, this rhyming story follows Llama Llama as he faces his first day without Mama—and finds out school can be pretty fun after all.

Wemberly Worried by **Kevin Henkes**. Wemberly worries about everything — especially starting school. This relatable and humorous book is ideal for easing the



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minds of little worriers.

LOWER ELEMENTARY (GRADES 1-3)

First Day Jitters by **Julie Danneberg**. With a surprise twist at the end, this clever story shows that everyone — even teachers — gets nervous on the first day.

School's First Day of School by **Adam Rex**. Told from the perspective of a brand-new school building, this book offers a funny and tender look at first-day nerves from an

unexpected point of view.

What If Everybody Did That? by **Ellen Javernick**. A great back-to-school reminder about kindness, personal responsibility and thinking of others, told through everyday classroom scenarios.

The Day You Begin by **Jacqueline Woodson**. This beautifully illustrated book encourages kids to embrace what makes them different and connect with others, even when they feel out of place.

UPPER ELEMENTARY (GRADES 4-6)

Wonder by **R.J. Palacio**. This modern classic follows Auggie, a boy with facial differences, as he attends school for the first time. It's a moving lesson in empathy, courage and friendship.

Because of Mr. Terupt by **Rob Buyea**. Told from the perspectives of seven fifth-graders, this novel shows how one special teacher can change lives and how

classmates grow together over the course of a year.

New Kid by **Jerry Craft**. In this award-winning graphic novel, Jordan navigates a new school where he's one of the few kids of color. It's honest, funny and full of heart.

Fish in a Tree by **Lynda Mullaly Hunt**. A powerful story about a girl with dyslexia who learns that everyone is smart in different ways, especially with the right support.

School Fundraisers

It's barely the second week of school, and your child has already come home with a catalog of cookie dough, a pledge form for a fun run and a reminder to send in baked goods for Friday's sale. Sound familiar?

School fundraisers are a common part of the academic year, helping raise money for everything from field trips and art supplies to classroom technology and extracurriculars. While supporting your child's school can feel rewarding, it can also start to feel overwhelming, especially when requests come in rapid-fire.

So how do you decide when to pitch in and when it's OK to sit one out?

UNDERSTANDING WHAT'S BEHIND THE ASK

First, it helps to know where the money is going. Many fundraisers support essential school functions that aren't covered by district budgets. Others fund special activities, like music performances, school gardens or new playgrounds. Ask what the goal is and how the funds will be used. Transparent communication can make it easier to support a cause that truly matters to your family.



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It's also worth noting who's organizing the event. Is it the school itself, the PTO or a third-party fundraising company? Some companies take a

significant cut of the proceeds, which might influence your decision to participate or opt for a direct donation instead.

FINDING WAYS TO SAY YES (WITHOUT OVERCOMMITTING)

If you want to support your school but can't (or don't want

to) sell wrapping paper to your entire contact list, look for alternatives. Some parents prefer to make a one-time financial contribution in lieu of selling. Others volunteer their time, like helping at an event or donating baked goods instead of buying raffle tickets.

Choose the fundraisers that align with your values and your schedule. Maybe you skip the fall fundraiser but show up big for the spring auction. Maybe you buy from one child's classroom effort but not another. It's all about finding a balance that works for you and your family.

HOW TO SAY NO WITH CONFIDENCE AND KINDNESS

It's completely OK to say no. You don't owe anyone an explanation, but if you want to be polite, a simple "We're not participating in this one, but thank you for thinking of us" does the job.

You can also set limits with your child. Explain that while you're proud of them for helping their school, you won't be able to contribute to every fundraiser. Let them help choose which ones to participate in. It's a great chance to teach financial responsibility and thoughtful giving.

At the end of the day, your value as a parent isn't measured in cookie sales or raffle tickets. Supporting your child's education comes in many forms and setting boundaries can be part of a healthy, supportive approach.

Creating a Study Space at Home

As the school year kicks off, students of all ages need a place to focus, think and learn.

A well-designed study space at home can make homework time smoother and help build healthy academic habits that last a lifetime.

Whether you have a kindergartner learning sight words or a high schooler tackling AP exams, creating a space that matches their needs can boost motivation and reduce stress. The key is finding a setup that minimizes distractions, encourages good posture and supports their unique learning style.

START WITH THE BASICS

Every study space needs a few essentials: a clean, flat surface; comfortable seating; good lighting; and easy access to supplies. That could be a desk in the bedroom, a kitchen table with a homework caddy or a quiet nook in the family room.

If possible, avoid having kids do homework in bed or on the couch, which can lead to poor focus or posture. Even a small table can work well if it's organized and used consistently.

Good lighting is important, especially for evening study sessions. A desk lamp with adjustable brightness can help reduce eye strain. For younger children, make sure the chair and table height allow their feet to rest flat and their arms



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to work comfortably.

MATCH THE SPACE TO THE STUDENT

A productive study area looks different for each age group. Younger children may need more supervision and benefit from working in a shared space where a parent can help as needed. Keep supplies like crayons, scissors and glue sticks nearby in labeled bins or a rolling cart. Use visual aids like checklists or a timer to help

them stay on task.

Older students may need more privacy and fewer interruptions. Encourage middle- and high-schoolers to take ownership of their space by decorating it with motivational quotes, calendars or their own artwork. Provide storage for textbooks, notebooks and devices so everything they need is within reach.

For students learning online or doing hybrid coursework, a dedicated tech setup can make

a big difference. Headphones, a charging station and a place to store a laptop safely can help avoid the scramble before each assignment or virtual meeting.

LIMIT DISTRACTIONS AND BUILD ROUTINES

The best study space won't help if it's surrounded by distractions. Try to keep toys, televisions and noisy siblings away from homework zones. If noise is unavoidable, consider playing soft background music

or using white noise to help your child concentrate.

Encourage kids to use their study space at consistent times. Even just 20–30 minutes a day in the same spot can create a positive routine that supports focus and time management.

No matter how big or small the area, the goal is the same: to help your child feel ready to learn. With just a few thoughtful touches, your home can become a supportive learning environment.