ADHD and Establishing Back to School Routines

**Transitioning from summer to school**

* As many parents know, summer is often a time of later bedtimes, more free time, and less structure.
* When starting a new school year, it is important to put in place structured and consistent routines.

**Creating a Structured Environment**

* A structured environment is organized and predictable
	+ There are consistent rules, expectations, and consequences that are clearly understood by your child and reinforced by you
* Why structure is important
	+ Creates a sense of security and benefits any child, with or without ADHD
	+ Helps to make things more efficient and helps to build good habits
	+ Decreases stress in the household because everyone is on the same page – there are less arguments about when and how tasks should be completed

**Why structure is especially important for children with ADHD**

* Children with ADHD struggle with self-control and self-regulation – as a result, they need more external control (e.g., structure, routines) to help ensure that tasks are completed despite symptoms of inattention and impulsivity
* Children with ADHD are less efficient processors; they are more likely to forget things or to become distracted while completing a task. Routines provide a structure to help them remember tasks and return to tasks when they have become distracted.

**Examples of important back-to-school routines**

* Consistent wake/sleep times
* Consistent meal times
* Designate a “school spot”
	+ Designate a spot to store backpacks, folders, lunch bags to make it easy to find things in the morning
* Designate a “homework spot” and time
	+ Designate a spot (relatively quiet and distraction free) where the child can complete homework each day (e.g., kitchen table)
	+ Designate a schedule for completing homework each day
	+ Some children need a brief “wind down” period after the school day to rest, eat a snack before starting homework
* Morning and evening school check-ins with your child
	+ Pick a time do a morning and afternoon check-in with your child on school
	+ Afternoon check
		- Do you have any homework to complete?
		- Does anything need signed?
	+ Morning check:
		- Did you pack your homework?
		- Do you have your books, lunch bag, coat, etc.?
* Evening routines to make the morning easier
	+ Make lunch the night before
	+ Lay out clothes to wear the next day
* Morning routines
	+ Get up at the same time
	+ Set a limit to how long your child is allowed to snooze
	+ Medication
* Routines for electronics
	+ Establish limits on when electronics can be used
	+ During the morning routine, there should be limits placed on TV, phones, computers, tablets at least until all morning tasks are completed
	+ Set designated times for using electronics in the afternoon (e.g., no electronics from 4-6 PM if there is homework to complete)
	+ Stop use of electronics at least 1 hour before bed and keep out of child’s room
* Parents – routine for checking on child’s school progress
	+ Establish a routine for checking in with the child’s teacher and their classroom performance (e.g., in person, email, checking grades online)
	+ If child uses a daily report card – have a routine for checking the report card each night

**How to implement healthy routines**

* **Consistency and commitment** are key
	+ All parents need to be on-board and present a united front together
	+ To be effective, routines need to be practiced every day.
	+ It will take some time to adapt to a new routine. Be sure to try a new routine for several weeks before deciding that it’s not working.
* Ensure that child’s tasks are **developmentally appropriate**
	+ Give your child tasks that they are likely to be able to do independently and successfully. This will differ depending on the age and abilities of your child.
	+ For example, for the task of preparing lunches the night before:
		- A 6-year-old would not be able to pick out and prepare their lunch on their own. However, they could likely help to make a PB&J sandwich if the ingredients are laid out.
	+ Set up the routine so that there is enough time for each task such that your child is likely to be successful at it. For example, if your child takes 30 minutes to get dressed in the morning, it would be unrealistic to expect them to be dressed in 10 minutes. When your child has shown initial successes, you can then decrease the time of the routine gradually to increase speed.
* **Discuss** routines and expectations with your child ahead of time
	+ Go over the steps of the routine with your child. Practice the steps if needed.
	+ Expect that you will need to provide more frequent prompts and oversight when your child is first learning a new routine
	+ Tell your child how you will provide prompts.
		- E.g., “When you come home at 3:30 pm, you will have 30 minutes to eat a snack and unwind. Homework time will start at 4:00 pm. I will have an alarm go off at 4:00 pm to prompt you to start homework.”
		- E.g., If using a daily report card: “When you come home at 3:30, you should place your daily report card on the counter for me to check. Then, you may chose a prepared snack from the fridge.”
	+ Discuss the consequences that will be in place for not following the routine
		- E.g., “If you haven’t started your homework by 4:15 pm, then you will lose 15 minutes of screen time for the day.”
		- E.g., If using a daily report card: “if you lose your daily report card or forget to bring it home, points [or privileges] will be taken away.”
	+ Also be sure to discuss and emphasize rewards for following the routine
		- E.g., “If you start homework on your own at 4:00 pm without any prompts from me, you will get an extra 15 minutes of screen time that day.”
		- E.g., If using a daily report card: “If your report card is filled out, and you’ve met your goals for today, you get 15 extra minutes of screen time tonight.”
* **Use Visual Systems**
	+ Picture cards can be used to build schedules to organize and structure daily activities (see examples attached).
	+ A picture card schedule can portray entire day's activities or detail the steps of one activity, such as brushing teeth.
	+ Visual systems provide children additional support when trying to complete tasks successfully to increase independence.
		- May take a “checklist” format, where a child checks off parts of a routine (i.e., morning routine) to remind them of all steps and keep them on track.
		- May also use picture strips for “First-Then” scenarios.
	+ **Post routine steps** in a place that is easily visible (e.g., family fridge, bathroom mirror)
* Setting up **Rewards/consequences**
	+ Praise effort, not just results
	+ Expect that improvement may be gradual
	+ Implement consequences for not complying with routine (e.g., refusing to complete homework or chores)
	+ Build in rewards to incentivize your child for remembering the steps of the routine
* **Model** organization, structure, and routine in your own life!
	+ Get up at a regular time each day, giving yourself enough time to complete all tasks
	+ Model using checklists and calendars for keeping up with tasks in your life
	+ Maintain an organized household where everything has a designated space. Model putting your belongings away in the proper place

**Examples of Daily routines**

***Morning routines***

* 7:00 am – Alarm goes off
* 7:15 am – Child out of bed
* 7:20 am – Morning bathroom routine
	+ Wash face
	+ Get dressed
	+ Put on deodorant
* 7:30 am – Breakfast
	+ Allow child to choose between 2 healthy but appealing options. Keep breakfast options similar each day
* 7:45 am – Brush teeth
* 7:50 am – Grab school supplies (already laid out)
* 8:00 am – leave for school
* *Notes:*
	+ To help the morning routine go smoother, set out materials the night before: prepare lunches, pick out clothes, check that homework is in backpack, etc.

***Meal routines***

* 6:00 pm – Parent meal prep
* 6:20 pm – Give child a 10-minute warning to finish up with TV/games
* 6:30 pm – Children set the table, pour drinks
* 6:45 pm – Parents bring food to the table
* 7:00 pm – Dinner served
	+ Mealtime talk: can go around the table and have everyone share one good thing about his/her day
* 7:30 pm – Children clear table, parents load the dishwasher
* Notes:
	+ No electronics/screens allowed during dinner
	+ When possible, entire family eats at table at same time

***Homework routines – see homework tip attachment***

* 3:30 pm - Child arrives home from school
* 30 minutes for snack, talking about school, unwinding
* 4:00 pm – Settle in at homework spot
	+ Homework is completed in a quiet, distraction-free place where the parent can monitor progress and answer questions.
	+ Build in regular breaks
* 5:30 pm - Parent checks homework for completion
* Reward:
	+ Once all homework is completed and checked, child is allowed to watch 30 minutes of their favorite show / play their favorite videogame
* Notes:
	+ No electronics allowed until homework completed
	+ Build in habit of “work then play” by completing homework first, then doing a rewarding activity after

***Bedtime routines***

* 7:30 pm – Screens shut off, including TV, phones, computers, etc.
* 7:30 pm – Kids help pick out clothes, get school materials together for the next day
* 8:00 pm – Shower or bath
	+ A hot Epsom salt bath can help to promote sleep and muscle relaxation
* 8:20 pm – Bathroom routine (put on bathroom mirror)
	+ Dry off
	+ Brush teeth
	+ Wash face
	+ Use the bathroom
* 8:30 pm – Put on PJs
* 8:40 pm – Read together
* 9:00 pm – Tell your child goodnight
	+ Praise your child, say a ritual goodnight

***Other tips***

* Keep school materials in the same spot (e.g., backpacks go on the bench near the front door, homework goes in folder in backpack)
* Use a family calendar!
* Use to-do lists and checklists; allow your child to check-off tasks as completed
* Give yourself a 5-10 minute extra buffer to complete all morning tasks in case of oversleeping, running behind, etc.

For more information, see:

<https://www.additudemag.com/sample-schedule-adhd-morning-after-school-bedtime/>

**VISUAL / PICTURE SCHEDULES**

Picture cards can be used to build schedules to organize and structure daily activities. Make them age appropriate for your child – pictures or words can be used. For home use, a picture card schedule can portray entire day's activities or detail the mini steps of one activity, such as brushing teeth. As an example, the following cards can be found on the [www.dotolearn.com](http://www.dotolearn.com) website. Adding space for stickers next to each task can help your child keep track of which sets they have completed and allows for rewards to be identified.



You can also create **“first-then”** strips.


"First you need to rest, then you can play outside"


"First you need to put on your helmet, then you can ride your bicycle”