

## August, 2009 What we all can learn from “Back to School”

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August is back to school time for many of my readers and their families. Even if you are not going or sending a family member back to school, there are things we can learn from this time of year! Here is a list of my favorite ideas, for our kids and for our selves:

1. **Early is always better.** Getting assignments done early leaves wiggle room. If we start homework early, we realize we left our school book behind early and still have time to go back and get it before school closes for the night. And I personally need to learn that being early to arrive for things is its own reward. No embarrassing explanations on why the Organizer is running late. Again.
2. **Flexibility is very important, but there are a few things that cannot be bent,** by any of us. Personal privacy, personal safety. In this house, we all know “Privacy!” means get out, avert your eyes, etc. And when I say “Stop!” in that certain mom-tone of voice, my boys stop, typically while getting out of the car or crossing the street.
3. **Sometimes, there is more than one solution to a problem.** I require my kids to work on their problem solving skills, but that means the solutions may not be what I would pick. I, as a mom, have to be open to those other solutions, even when they are not mine. For example, we moved the furniture out of two rooms for the floor-refinisher to work, and there is a 6.5 foot leather couch standing on end in my family room. Not the obvious solution, not even our first or second idea. But it is working!
4. **The “Why”. We are big on “The Why”.** If possible, I try to explain “The Why” we do things for my family while we do those things. It helps my family know I am not just arbitrarily making up rules to bug them, and they are more likely to comply and remember next time.
5. **Accountability is critical.** Homework is great for teaching kids about due dates / deadlines. They also learn how to cut really big projects into smaller, more manageable pieces with multiple deadlines. I know I write better and keep to task better when I have due dates and deadlines, and when I have to be accountable to another person.
6. **Myth of multitasking: We cannot do 2 things well at the same time.** My sons really cannot listen to me while playing video games. Cannot watch TV and do homework. I really cannot write a newsletter and cook dinner, unless the newsletter is about cooking dinner. Who am I kidding? One thing at a time.
7. **Have assigned spots for your most important items.** With the work being done on the house, my older sons will not have access to their bedrooms for a few days. It was interesting to watch them get the stuff they considered essential to their happiness out of their room. Then I went back for things like clothes and shoes! In the context of Back To School, most important items are Backpacks (briefcase or handbag), homework (professional work!), sneakers, umbrellas (dried and put back into pack or briefcase), cell phone and car keys, etc. All items just listed have designated hooks and shelves near the door, to facilitate a timely departure!
8. **A few words on routines: Morning and bedtime routines are essential for success,** whether you are 6 or 60. Figure out the 4 or 5 tasks that will propel you out the door on-time, and do them either before you go to bed or first thing in the morning. We pack lunches and lay out clothes in the evening, and put backpacks with completed assignments on assigned hooks by the door. That leaves breakfast, personal grooming, getting dressed and making the bed for the morning. Very manageable for all ages.

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