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Starting the year right

Welcome to 2023. The holidays are over. School is back. And routines are recommencing. For many families this means:

- extra stress (some kids don't feel excited about heading to kindy/prep/reception or school),
- extra costs (let's face it, uniforms, shoes, and the rest of it all)
- extra challenges (ADHD, dyslexia, other needs, friendship issues, learning difficulties).

Of course, it's not all bad news. Some families are delighted. Holidays create stress because of babysitting challenges, costs for entertainment, and more.

And fortunately, there are tens of thousands of our kids that actually enjoy school and are glad to be back.

As it happens – so are we! Parenting Ideas has been providing helpful parenting advice to parents in early learning centres, primary schools, and high schools around Australia, New Zealand, and the world for over two decades! This year it's no different.



How can we help?

As we dive into 2023, we want to know how we can be most useful to you. Headed up by Dr Justin Coulson, co-host and parenting expert of Channel Nine's Parental Guidance and host of Australia's #1 parenting podcast, Dr Justin Coulson's Happy Families, Justin and a team of experts will be bringing you a range of articles designed to give you the best parenting advice available to help make your family happier.

If there's a major challenge you'd like help with, email us and let us know. Title your email "Parenting Ideas advice" and email schools@happyfamilies.com.au. We're here to help.

For the first Insights article of 2023, we're going to look at how we can get our routines on track at the outset and keep everyone focused on what matters most for making your family function.

Starting the year right

If you're like most parents, you really wanted to start things off well, but it's been a little rocky. Getting back into a routine, being on time, sorting out school lunches... it's a bit tricky. Best laid plans haven't quite been as smooth as you might have liked. To dial in your morning and evening routines, I'm going to suggest a few principles to help.

Get clear on what 'getting it right' actually means.

You might know what you want the morning to look like. But is it clear to you? Can you write it down? Can you put it on the fridge? Can you explain it to your kids and help them to buy into why it matters? Clearly explaining what you want and why is going to be a critical first step.

Set up a system.

Author, James Clear, says that "you do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems." So what does your system look like for making things happen? Can you create a system that will facilitate a smooth morning for every member of the family?



Workshop it.

Setting up a system when you're a parent is pretty easy. But bringing the family along can be trickier. By having a meeting and developing the system with input from your kids, you get to be clear, establish the system, and create buy-in. Ask your children to make suggestions and design the morning based on their ideas. Fashion it with your expert knowledge. And watch the results improve because your children have been part of it. Involvement is a central success pillar when it comes to developing a system that works in any family.

Curate competence.

The real secret to successful routines is helping the kids become self-sufficient. It takes time, but teaching them to toast their bread or crumpets, fry or scramble some egg, or organise their cereal or yogurt, or even blend a smoothie means that there is less friction with your routine. They feel good about doing what needs to be done because they know how to do it. And while it's slow at first, it becomes wonderfully efficient over time.

Support autonomy.

Kids love to have choices. They appreciate being able to make their own decisions. Support them in that while ensuring they know what the guidelines and boundaries are for making things happen well.

Here are the golden rules of a magic morning (from a dad of six who has talked with thousands of parents about getting this right):

1. Your morning begins the night before. Get the prep done for tomorrow at bedtime so uniforms are ready, bags are packed, and library books or sports gear is sorted.
2. Create margin by waking up a little early, and getting the kids up (gently) a little early too. Room to breathe makes everything work better.
3. Create the structure so everyone knows what needs to be done.
4. Keep the kids accountable in a supportive way.



In spite of your best efforts, things will go pear-shaped now and then. When this happens, stay calm (remember: emotions are contagious), don't sweat the small stuff, be flexible for the morning... but get it back on track the next day by having a calm conversation in the evening, reinforcing the system, and working together on making it work.

Whether it's magic mornings or excellent evenings, the process is the same. Work as a team, and watch the magic happen... at least sometimes.

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