

# 5 Tips for A Successful School Year



**By Angela Nelson, MS, BCBA**  
Executive Director of Family and  
Clinical Services, Rethink

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Ahhh, the beginning of the school year! This time of year can be met with a combination of excitement, nervousness, curiosity, and a laundry list of To-Do's. At Rethink, we often hear our parents talk about things they want to do differently each fall or new ways of approaching their child's education. A new school year routine? Check. Better collaboration with your child's teacher? Check. Let's take a look at 5 tips to help get this school year off on the right foot...

## Tip #1- Start Preparing Now

Being prepared and proactive is something most parents would agree with and if you have a child with special needs, this is even more crucial. Some children need time to transition or to be taught new skills before their first day so they feel more comfortable. Going to campus early to walk the halls, find classrooms, or just get reacquainted with school may be a good way to transition back. Adjusting your child's bed/wake times a few weeks early may help their bodies adjust to the soon-to-be schedule. Some children benefit from having visual supports, such as a highlighted calendar, to see when school is starting to help them anticipate. Another support may be in the form of a social story or other books to help them understand the rules of school and what to expect.

If your child is starting middle or high school, you may want to research the new experiences your child will encounter ahead of time so you can help them prepare. Will they have a locker you can visit together for the first time? Will they start using a combination lock during physical education? Middle and high school transitions are tough enough so helping your child prepare ahead of time can ease some anxieties.



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Lastly, this might be a good time to review your child's goals and if they have one, their IEP (Individualized Education Program). Are you meeting soon with the school or should you request a meeting to revisit your child's goals and progress? The new school year is always a great time to start fresh and make sure everyone is on the same page regarding your child's path to success.

#### Tip #2- Have A Schedule Or Routine

Having a schedule or routine can help create family expectations, lessen stress, build independence, and save everyone time. As mentioned in Tip #1, visuals can be a great support for children of all ability levels. Having a dry erase board listing out the daily or weekly events can be an effective way to manage everyone's expectations. Some families find that using checklists help build their child's independence and keep them moving forward in tasks such as chores and homework.

A school lunch prep routine can expedite those morning rushes. If the parents prep the night before or create healthy options, the children can grab from marked bins to assemble their lunch boxes in the morning. Parents can modify depending on their child's ability level and decrease their prompting over time.

Similarly, a routine for the evening can be just as important as the morning. Having a set plan and sticking to it can help facilitate a good night's rest for your child. Some parents find that choosing specific activities before bed with the child's input (e.g., 2 books, 1 song, hugs) can help the evening run more smoothly.

A homework routine can also be something to consider as your child grows. Some children have trouble attending, focusing, or getting started on their own. Setting up a homework station in a quiet area, complete with visual reminders (e.g., labels, checklist for tasks), a timer, a snack, and possibly a reinforcer for when homework is done without reminders from parents (e.g., free to hang out with friends if finished by 4:30pm) can help keep those homework struggles at bay.

#### Tip #3- Collaborate With Your Child's School

Regular collaboration with your child's school has many benefits, including having ongoing opportunities for problem solving, being more efficient at each interaction, and maximizing your child's success through the collective efforts/input/knowledge of both parents and educators. Here are a few ways to collaborate with your child's school and bridge the gap:

1. Give information- your child's likes/dislikes/motivators, other therapies, recent assessments or medical outcomes

2. Get information- the educators' names, daily schedule, goal progress, behavior logs
3. Meet- meet ongoing, ask to have an initial school year meeting, attend IEPs, go to school events
4. Create a communication system- a log in your child's backpack, regular email or calls, communication apps, or a checklist you create. Talk with your child's teacher to find the best solution
5. Compromise- listen to feedback and suggestions from teachers, give your suggestions, know what is important and not important to you regarding goals for your child, be open and willing to work as a team
6. Get and give help- feel confident asking for translation or interpretation services, assistance with IEP rights, help with implementing goals at home, other resources in the community or mentorship. Offer to help in the classroom or if that is not possible, ask what you can send to school with your child to assist with his/her learning

#### Tip #4- Generalize What's Learned In School At Home

With additional practice across multiple settings and people, your child has a better shot at making quicker progress and maintaining skills. A great way to make the most of your collaboration with the school is to take what your child is learning and apply it at home, at the park, at a friend's house, etc.

Is your child working on social skills at school? Can you seamlessly work these same strategies in while playing with peers at the park or at a playdate? Or, is your child working on complex math word problems? Can you create scenarios involving everyday home situations to integrate practice opportunities? While it might require you to be extra mindful of creating these opportunities at first, it can become second nature with a little practice.

#### Tip #5- Seek Or Accept Support For Yourself

While you might wonder what this has to do with a successful school year, we know that parents need "gas in the tank" to be proactive and collaborative for another year. Whether you take advantage of informal supports, such as family or friends, or more formal sources, such as counseling or other services, it's something to consider this year. Taking care of yourself and accepting support can help you have more patience for the hectic schedule, more skills to better teach your child, and more tools to be a collaborative partner your child's education.

If you haven't already taken advantage of Rethink's free tools and consultation services, let us know and we can help.

We hope you and your child have a great school experience and look forward to supporting you this year!

