

SCHOOL MORNINGS WITHOUT THE STRESS: HOW TO GET YOUR CHILD UP AND OUT THE DOOR WITH THE LEAST AMOUNT OF CONFLICT

AUGUST 2016 RESOURCE SHARING

What makes school mornings so hard? They're kind of like a perfect storm. You have a number of things that have to get done, and there's also a time limit. Mornings are definitely tough for most families whether the child has a psychiatric diagnosis or not. However, the stress quotient can rise among families with a child who has special needs. Many kids have difficulty with transitions, and the morning is all about transitions done under a hard and fast deadline. So what's a parent to do to both get out the door on time and with as little conflict as possible?

Plan Ahead

First, think about what can be done the night before such as making lunches, taking showers, organizing backpacks, and laying out clothes.

Temper Expectations

It's a good idea for parents to prioritize the essential steps—what must get done—vs. the “icing on the cake” steps, at least at first. Exactly what is essential? The reality is often that the child at least has all of his clothes on, has something in his stomach, and has brushed his teeth. Once the essential steps become habit, parents can focus on the “icing,” which can include things like a child keeping his hands to himself around a sibling, making his bed and organizing his things.

Use Visual Prompts

Visual prompts might include posted schedules and photos of targeted behaviors, such as a picture of a child brushing her teeth near the sink.

Create Incentives

When it comes to making mornings better, rewards are also key. They can be either short term, involving some kind of immediate treat or, because of the time crunch, earned privileges to be enjoyed later (i.e. special breakfast or points earned for 30 minutes of screen time in the evening.).

Stay Calm

When parents hit bumps in the road and tempers are flaring, they need to think about ways to deescalate the situation. There are several ways parents can try to deescalate a situation, such as:

- Speaking in a calm tone
- Being clear about expectations
- Continuing to praise even small efforts rather than focusing on what the child might not be doing
- Focusing on the next step in the process
- Keeping one's eye on the prize, both in the short and long terms

To download the entire tip sheet and for more information please visit: <http://childmind.org/article/school-mornings-without-the-stress/>