

TOPIC: Back to School: Getting Kids and Yourself Ready for the Transition

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Micro Training Course Developed by Kimberly Mouriquand, Family Support Specialist for the Alaska Center for Resource Families

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENT TRAINING CREDIT: To earn 1.0 Hour of Training Credit, read through this self-study, fill out the Questionnaire and Return to ACRF.

The month of August usually marks the end of summer and the start of school. Foster families can use early August to help prepare the children in their care for the transition from a mellow yellow summer to a more structured routine and schedule for school.

Following are some tips and ideas about how to ease into the structure and routine.

1. Be aware of how your child handles transitions, both small and large. Knowing your child's response will help gauge the time you need to spend preparing your child(ren) for heading back to school.
2. Find ways to give voice to your children's wants and wishes. When children feel they have a sense of control they're more likely to happily go along with the requests or expectations. This will make morning and bedtime routines move easily and build confidence in your youth! For more ideas: check out Karen Purvis' Sharing Power with your Child <https://youtu.be/T3Vtza1V8Mk>
3. Start open communication with your schools. Does your child's school have a meet your teacher night? How about an open house? Don't assume because your child attended the same school last year that they aren't nervous about attending this year. Tour the school in advance if possible and allow the child to get to know their environment. Talk with your child's principal, teacher and school team about what your child needs to be successful and how you can address challenging behaviors as a team. Be sure to also get the proper paperwork for signatures from your social worker for medications that need to be administered during the school day.
4. If you're aware of sports that your child would like to participate in, make sure you're communicating with his or her social worker and birth parent to get the proper releases signed for contact sports (like football or hockey) and to keep them informed of the schedule so they can attend games.
5. Go to your district's website and print your school year calendar so you can start planning for those half days, teacher in-service days, and holidays for child care and activities. It's also important to keep Parent-Teacher Conferences on your mind and notify the social worker and birth parent so they can participate as well.
6. Check with your child's school for the detailed list of what each child will need for classroom supplies. Also, don't forget about FosterWear. As a licensed foster parent, there are several retailers throughout the state of Alaska that offer discounts for foster youth. Find the list here: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Documents/fosterwear/statusreport.pdf>

7. In an age appropriate manner, involve your child with his/her school prep process. If possible, take him/her out for a special day to get new school clothes and backpack. Have an ice cream or snack and talk about things that are exciting and scary about school and making new friends.
8. Start a special tradition for the first day of school- smiley face pancakes, make your own omelet (continue that throughout the year when returning to school from break). Remember high protein, low sugar breakfast to kick start their day.
9. Have a family meeting with a large calendar and write down something scheduled for each child (so they see their name).
10. Start practicing your school routines several weeks in advance. See below for more info.

Preparing Schedules and Routines

Predictability for a child in care is essential for helping them feel safe. When kids know what to expect, they're able to focus on growing and learning! Below are some tips on developing a morning, after school, and bedtime routine.

Morning Routine: Pre-Teach and talk with your child about what the morning is going to look like for school. Begin practicing getting up in the morning, going through the morning routine, and heading out the door so that it's not a new thing the first week of school.

Here are few questions to ask yourself and talk with your family about:

- Will everyone have their own alarm or will parents be waking everyone up?
- Who gets to use the bathroom first and how long can they be in for?
- Do you eat breakfast as a family or is everyone free to eat on their own?
- Is there a time that each person needs to be ready by? And what does "ready" mean?
- What's the plan for when someone doesn't feel good in the morning? Or has an accident?
- How will each child get to school? Walking, you or a trusted adult will drive them, ride the bus?

After School Routine: Talk with your kids about what after school is going to look like. Making sure to talk with your child several times and in advance about what the after school routine will look like will ease their concerns so that they know what will happen next.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself and talk with your family about:

- How will the child get home from school? Will they ride the bus home from school and walk from a bus stop, walk from the school, or be picked up?
- Will you or someone you know and trust pick them up from school, an after school program, or sport practice?
- What are the expectations for after school until dinner time? Homework? Chores? Social time? Try providing kids opportunities to make decisions and choices so they feel empowered. Would you like snack first or to start your homework first? Would you like some outside/social time before chores or after chores?

- Is your child going to pack a lunch or buy it at school? Ask your child what they'd like for lunch for the week and enlist their help in packing lunch for the next day to save time the next morning.

Bedtime Routine: Bedtime routines will vary for your kids depending on their ages and the amount of sleep each of them need. Having a structured routine for bedtime will help your kids get the rest they need to be successful at school the next day. We know that most children between the ages of 5 and 12 years old need about 10-11 hours of sleep and teenagers need about 8.5 to 9 hours to recharge.

Here are a few tips and ideas for developing a bedtime routine with your kids:

- Talk with your kids about what's expected in the evening after dinner. Is your household the kind that everyone bathes the night before, can you make changes for teens who want to shower in the morning? Is there a list of things that need to happen before jumping in bed like picking out clothes for the next day, brushing teeth, taking medication? Do your children need this list presented differently (pictures, written down, verbally reminded)?
- Kids from rough places often metabolize food at different rates. Try incorporating a high protein evening snack into your bedtime routine so they don't wake up in the night hungry.
- Pick and choose your battles. While brushing our teeth is important, is it more important than a restful night's sleep if it's going to create a power struggle?
- Plan for tough emotions. Bedtime and being alone can be tough for youth in care. Add in the anxiety from starting school and you may have a long night ahead. Ask kids what they need and find ways to say 'yes' within reason. It could be reading an extra page from the bedtime story, or allowing your teen to play the radio while they fall asleep.

***** ADDITIONAL READING *****

- 9 Steps to a Smart Start <https://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/back-to-school-blues/>
- 10 ways to Help your Child Succeed in Elementary School <http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/school-help-elementary.html?WT.ac=p-ra>
- 10 ways to Help your Child Succeed in Middle School <http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/school-help-middle.html?WT.ac=p-ra>
- 10 ways to Help your Child Succeed in Elementary School <http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/school-help-teens.html?WT.ac=p-ra>

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