

# Getting Off to a Good Start

**QUESTION:** What's the best way to get my children off to a good start in school this fall?

**ANSWER:** Starting a new school year can be both exciting and stressful. Here are a few ideas to make the first weeks a positive experience for everybody:

- Talk about the "school time routine" a few days before school actually starts. When are heads to be on the pillow and lights out? When will the alarm go off in the morning? Is breakfast at the kitchen table or at school? What time will the school bus arrive or your car leave the driveway?
- Find out what your kids are expecting to happen the first weeks of school. My boys were four years apart in age, but each, independently, told me firmly in August that they couldn't go to first grade. When I asked, in surprise, "Why not?" they told me that they couldn't read! It was my job to explain that their teacher might be nervous, but they didn't have to be. Their teacher was responsible for teaching them to read; they didn't need to know before they got there. (Apparently, my kids were learning the Boy Scout motto: Be Prepared.)
- Make a homework plan before school starts. Talk about it together. When will homework be completed - right after school, before supper, right after supper? Where will it get done? I really encourage parents to turn off the TV in the house during homework time. Our children's homework time is a great time for us to do some reading, our own project or even cleaning. It gives the message that we're focusing on things that need to get done, too. While our children's homework is not for us to do, it's a fortunate child who has a parent close by for encouragement and brainstorming. One of the reasons I liked school was because I had parents who listened to my spelling words, read my essays and explained grammar mistakes and found me a math tutor.
- Be alert to what's really important to your child in terms of "fitting in" during that first week of school. While we don't need to get our kids everything they think they need to have, they will be very grateful if we understand that "something" is really important: it might be the box of new crayons, a certain lunchbox or backpack, one pair of brand name jeans, or a shirt that's a particular color.

