

Let's Get Organized for Back-to-School!

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Sarah here. I'm ironically writing this post about having an organized approach to back-to-school amidst utter chaos...paint supplies cover one table...Legos have taken completely taken over the dining room... this is what life looks like right now. Things are incredibly disorganized. This is partially because we just are a messy family and partially because we are a messy family that is coping and keeping busy during a pandemic. We have *a lot* of stuff going on...



So, the irony of writing about having an organized approach to anything isn't lost on me. That being said, whether or not your physical environment is a disaster, your approach to back-to-school doesn't have to be. There's a lot of variability in what back-to-school will look like in the time of COVID-19 depending on the city and state in which you live, whether your kids will be attending school virtually or in-person, and the plans and procedures the school has in place.

Unsure about the "right" thing to do for your kids and their education? Having doubts about the plan? You're not alone. Unsure how things will actually go once school starts? You're not the only one! So, how do you prepare for back-to-school when this is anything but a typical year? Back-to-school shopping, while potentially stressful, is also a really fun and exciting time

of year for kids...and for some adults. I *love* back to school shopping- new pencils and pens, crisp notebooks and planners. There's something magical and exciting about it all.

Despite my love for back-to-school supplies, I get that this year's shopping just doesn't feel the same. This year *isn't* the same- there's a massive cloud of stress and uncertainty hanging over us all. As a mom, you still have to help your kids prepare to go back to school- even if you're all feeling frazzled, tired or over it. Even if your kids will be "going" back to school at home with your support. Here are some things to consider as you gear up for back-to-school:

- ***What system needs to be in place?*** Whether your kids will be returning to school physically or virtually, what structure or system needs to be in place to help them to be successful?
 - Will you need to create a schedule for their time?
 - Will you and/or your spouse be providing instruction?
 - Will you need to get a tutor or outside support?
 - If you're going full on homeschool this year, what curriculum will you be using? Will you join a co-op and, if so, have you identified one?
 - When you think about systemic/structural needs for back-to-school, you may use an existing structure, or you may need to piece things together on your own. Consider:
 - How will your kids' academic needs get met?
 - How will your kids' social needs get met?
 - How will your kids' physical needs get met?
 - How will your kids' creative needs get met?
- ***What supports will you and/or your kids need?*** What agencies (schools, childcare facilities, businesses that provide tutoring and extracurricular activities) and/or individuals (relatives, friends, tutors, therapists, etc.) will you want/need to formally or informally engage?
- ***What back-to-school supplies do you need?*** Back-to-school supplies may vary based on whether your child will be attending school virtually or in-person.
 - For kids attending brick-and-mortar schools, check out the school's supply list for their grade. Your kid may also have supplies left over from last school year since they finished it out at home, so you may not have to start from scratch.

- For kids attending virtual school or participating in hybrid learning, they will need some of the same school supplies. They'll also need access to a reliable tablet or laptop (school-issued or personally owned) and a consistent internet connection.
- Headphones that your kids can wear for prolonged periods of time are a necessity if they're attending virtual school. Headphones are also important for kids attending school in-person, since they may work independently on devices. They don't need to be *expensive* or *trendy* headphones or ear buds- they need to fit, stay in place, be reliable and comfortable. Bonus features may be useful even for younger kids. Before you cross off a wireless option, consider that kids won't accidentally unplug their headphones and will be less likely to have freak accidents (like dragging their laptop off the table) if there isn't a cable attaching their headphones to their device. Kids may be less distracted and need less redirection if background noise is muted with noise cancellation ear buds. Before committing to a set, consider how sturdy they are or how easy it would be to lose a given set of ear buds. Know your kids. 😊
- ***What's the backup plan?*** I don't want to think about it. I'm sure you don't want to consider it either. But, if stuff goes sideways, what (if anything) is your backup plan? This may mean thinking through how you'll manage if school shifts from brick-and-mortar to virtual. It could mean identifying agencies that could supervise your child or provide homework help. Your school system may already have a backup plan in place, so it's a good idea to check with them first.

All over the country, back-to-school is happening in some form or fashion. As a parent, you're dealing with fatigue, stress and lots of uncertainty. You're an amazing mom who's doing the best you can. Remember that kids are resilient and so are you! At some point, this too shall pass. So, take a deep breath and take time to think through back-to-school. Talk with your kids. Make sure you everyone is comfortable with the game plan. Now- ready for a silver lining? I've spoken with a number of kids—even ones who typically *hate* school— and most of them are *so excited* for school to finally start. I bet you are too. 😊