

BACK **AT** SCHOOL

What every parent needs to know about 'Back At School' but was afraid to ask.

Getting and staying organized can seem daunting at the best of times – let alone once the kids are back at school and embroiled in numerous activities. With the pressures on families to do it all – work, school, community service, music, sports and social activities – stress levels can run high without a workable routine.

"It's not only important to set up a routine," says Wendy Hollick, Chapter Chair of the Halton-Peel Chapter of Professional Organizers of Canada. "You need to involve your children in setting it up. That makes the entire process a lot easier."

Hollick, who is also the owner of Neat Spaces Professional Organizing Service (www.neatspaces.ca), advises that the more you can do the night before, the

better position you and your family will be in.

Setting out clothes, making lunches and snacks, and preparing any paperwork (like permission slips) are all big time-savers if done in advance... even determining that the morning's transportation needs are taken care of can be a huge help.

"Are bus passes handy? Are bicycles and helmets in good repair and in their respective places? And... you'd be surprised how many kids are late because mom or dad couldn't find the car keys," says Hollick.

Lynn and Tony Pacheco and their three kids, Nick, 16, Holly, 14, and Antonio, 12, are great examples of a well organized 'back at school' system. Lynn agrees that preparation the night before is a great timesaver. As a fail-safe, Pacheco calls home once she arrives to work

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just after 7 a.m. to ensure that things are running as planned.

Pacheco's flex hours at work allow her to be at home when the kids return after school, enabling her to monitor homework and connect with her kids while preparing dinner.

Hollick also thinks planning for homework is important. "Typically," she says, "homework should be done at a regular time, in a visible area that is well stocked with necessary supplies. That way, there isn't any scrambling around for pens or paper, and you know that they're doing homework, and not chatting online."

Hollick advises that a bedtime routine is fundamental to a successful 'back-at-school' strategy. Pacheco concurs. She says that in the weeks leading up to the onset

of school, she got her kids back to an earlier bedtime because, as she puts it, "they need to get used to getting up early. No more sleeping until noon."

Hollick offers other helpful tips that can help you maintain a virtually stress-free 'back-at-school' plan:

- Establish a meal plan for the week – it saves time and avoids 'finicky-eater' frustrations;
- Don't overschedule your kids or yourself. Avoid the stress that comes with activity-overload.
- Set up an easily accessible file folder system so each child's information – schedule, activity requirements, impending deadlines, etc. – is complete, and at your fingertips.
- And, of course, maintain a highly-visible family calendar.

There are many more things



Professional organizer Wendy Hollick is shown with her children (Bailee, Connor, and Abbey) as they get ready for school.

that you can do to fine tune your routine. For instance, Pacheco touts the advantages of making lists... but knowing what's ahead, what's in progress and what you need to do to maximize time while minimizing stress. All this will keep you more than one step ahead of the game.