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Back-to-School Tips

The following health and safety tips are from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

Making the First Day Easier

- Remind your child that there are probably a lot of students who are uneasy about the **first day of school**. Teachers know that students are anxious and will make an extra effort to make sure everyone feels as comfortable as possible.
- Point out the positive aspects of starting school: It will be fun! She'll see old friends and meet new ones. Refresh her positive memories about previous years, when she may have returned home after the first day with high spirits because she had a good time.
- Find another child in the neighborhood with whom your youngster can walk to school or ride on the bus.
- If you feel it is appropriate, drive your child (or walk with her) to school and pick her up on the first day.



Backpack Safety

- Choose a **backpack** with wide, padded shoulder straps and a padded back.
- Pack light. Organize the backpack to use all of its compartments. Pack heavier items closest to the center of the back. The backpack should never weigh more than 10 to 20 percent of your child's body weight.
- Always use both shoulder straps. Slinging a backpack over one shoulder can strain muscles.
- If your school allows, consider a rolling backpack. This type of backpack may be a good choice for students who must tote a heavy load. Remember that rolling backpacks still must be carried up stairs, and they may be difficult to roll in snow.

Traveling To and From School

Review the basic rules with your youngster:

School Bus

- If your child's **school bus** has **lap/shoulder seat belts**, make sure your child uses one at all times when in the bus. If your child's school bus does not have lap/shoulder belts, encourage the school to buy or lease buses with lap/shoulder belts.
- Wait for the bus to stop before approaching it from the curb.
- Do not move around on the bus.
- Check to see that no other traffic is coming before crossing the street.
- Make sure you walk where you can see the bus driver (which means the driver will be able to see you, too).
- Children should always board and exit the bus at locations that provide safe access to the bus or to the school building.

Car

- All passengers should wear a seat belt and/or an age- and size-appropriate **car seat** or **booster seat**.
- Your child should ride in a car seat with a harness as long as possible and then ride in a belt-positioning booster seat. Your child is ready for a booster seat when she has reached the top weight or height allowed for her seat, her shoulders are above the top harness slots, or her ears have reached the top of the seat.
- Your child should ride in a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle's seat belt fits properly (usually when the child reaches about 4' 9" in height and is between 8 to 12 years of age). This means that the child is tall

enough to sit against the vehicle seat back with her legs bent at the knees and feet hanging down and the shoulder belt lies across the middle of the chest and shoulder, not the neck or throat; the lap belt is low and snug across the thighs, and not the stomach.

- All children younger than 13 years of age should ride in the rear seat of vehicles. If you must drive more children than can fit in the rear seat (when carpooling, for example), move the front-seat passenger's seat as far back as possible and have the child ride in a booster seat if the seat belts do not fit properly without it.
- Remember that many crashes occur while novice **teen drivers** are going to and from school. You should require seat belt use, limit the number of teen passengers, and do not allow eating, drinking, cell phone conversations, **texting** or other mobile device use to prevent driver distraction. Limit nighttime driving and driving in inclement weather. Familiarize yourself with your state's graduated driver's license law and consider the use of a parent-teen driver agreement to facilitate the early driving learning process. For a sample parent-teen driver agreement, [click here](#).

Bike

- Always wear a **bicycle helmet**, no matter how short or long the ride.
- Ride on the right, in the same direction as auto traffic.
- Use appropriate hand signals.
- Respect traffic lights and stop signs.
- Wear bright-colored clothing to increase visibility. White or light-colored clothing is especially important after dark.
- Know the "rules of the road." See <http://www.aap.org/family/bicycle.htm>

Walking to School

- Make sure your child's **walk to school** is a safe route with well-trained adult crossing guards at every intersection.
- Be realistic about your child's pedestrian skills. Because small children are impulsive and less cautious around traffic, carefully consider whether or not your child is ready to walk to school without adult supervision.
- If your children are young or are walking to a new school, walk with them the first week or until you are sure they know the route and can do it safely.
- Bright-colored clothing will make your child more visible to drivers.
- In neighborhoods with higher levels of traffic, consider organizing a "walking school bus," in which an adult accompanies a group of neighborhood children walking to school.

Eating During the School Day

- Most schools regularly send schedules of cafeteria menus home. With this advance information, you can plan on packing lunch on the days when the main course is one your child prefers not to eat.
- Try to get your child's school to stock **healthy choices** such as fresh fruit, low-fat dairy products, water and 100 percent fruit juice in the vending machines.
- Each 12-ounce **soft drink** contains approximately 10 teaspoons of sugar and 150 calories. Drinking just one can of soda a day increases a child's risk of obesity by 60%. Restrict your child's soft drink consumption.

Bullying

Bullying is when one child picks on another child repeatedly. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or social. It can happen at school, on the playground, on the school bus, in the neighborhood, **over the Internet**, or through mobile devices like cell phones.

When Your Child Is Bullied

- Help your child learn how to respond by teaching your child how to:
 - Look the bully in the eye.
 - Stand tall and stay calm in a difficult situation.
 - Walk away.
- Teach your child how to say in a firm voice.
 - "I don't like what you are doing."
 - "Please do NOT talk to me like that."
 - "Why would you say that?"
- Teach your child when and how to ask for help.
- Encourage your child to make friends with other children.
- Support activities that interest your child.
- Alert school officials to the problems and work with them on solutions.
- Make sure an adult who knows about the bullying can watch out for your child's safety and well-being when you cannot be there.
- Monitor your child's social media or texting interactions so you can identify problems before they get out of

hand.

When Your Child Is the Bully

- Be sure your child knows that bullying is never OK.
- Set firm and consistent limits on your child's aggressive behavior.
- Be a positive role model. Show children they can get what they want without teasing, threatening or hurting someone.
- Use effective, non-physical discipline, such as loss of privileges.
- Develop practical solutions with the school principal, teachers, counselors, and parents of the children your child has bullied.

When Your Child Is a Bystander

- Tell your child not to cheer on or even quietly watch bullying.
- Encourage your child to tell a trusted adult about the bullying.
- Help your child support other children who may be bullied. Encourage your child to include these children in activities.
- Encourage your child to join with others in telling bullies to stop.

Before and After School Child Care

- During early and middle childhood, youngsters need **supervision**. A responsible adult should be available to get them ready and off to school in the morning and watch over them after school until you return home from **work**.
- **Children approaching adolescence** (11- and 12-year-olds) should not come home to an empty house in the afternoon unless they show unusual maturity for their age.
- If alternate adult supervision is not available, parents should make special efforts to supervise their children from a distance. Children should have a set time when they are expected to arrive at home and should check in with a neighbor or with a parent by telephone.
- If you choose a commercial **after-school program**, inquire about the training of the staff. There should be a high staff-to-child ratio, and the rooms and the playground should be safe.

Developing Good Homework and Study Habits

- Create an environment that is conducive to doing **homework**. Youngsters need a permanent work space in their bedroom or another part of the home that is quiet, without distractions, and promotes study.
- Schedule ample time for homework.
- Establish a household rule that the TV set stays off during homework time.
- Supervise computer and Internet use.
- Be available to answer questions and offer assistance, but never do a child's homework for her.
- Take steps to help alleviate eye fatigue, neck fatigue and brain fatigue while studying. It may be helpful to close the books for a few minutes, stretch, and take a break periodically when it will not be too disruptive.
- If your child is struggling with a particular subject, and you aren't able to help her yourself, a tutor can be a good solution. Talk it over with your child's teacher first.
- Some children need help organizing their homework. Checklists, timers, and parental supervision can help overcome homework problems.

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