

# Growing Up

Children Need Tune Ups for School  
By Dan Florell, PhD and Praveena Salins, MD

As summer vacation comes to an end it is time to get your children ready for the new school year. We view the beginning of the school year as a perfect chance to make sure your children are ready to learn to their fullest potential. In order to do this, you will need to address both their mind and body.

First, make sure your child's body is "finely tuned". Yearly checkups are important to address physical, behavioral, and educational issues. We encourage using your child's pediatrician or family practitioner for yearly physicals as it ensures continuity of care over many years. They have your child's comprehensive medical history at hand which allows them to monitor their growth, follow their development, and manage chronic illness (if any). Annual checkups are also a great time to verify all immunizations are updated. Your child should also be seen by an optometrist and dentist. Some problems children experience in school can be due to issues with not being able to see well or having a toothache that distracts them from learning.

One last step for the physical "fine tuning" is to prepare a medical records file of your child. If you have had to see multiple providers for services, it is very beneficial to start a folder with all of your child's medical and educational records. These can greatly assist health professionals in getting up to speed on your child's history and past issues.

Once your child's physical health has been cleared, it is time to get a "mental tune up" and getting everyone used to the idea of heading back to school. There are several basic steps you can take to facilitate this transition

- Mark your calendar – Part of preparing your child for school is getting prepared yourself. This includes marking significant school dates in your calendar.
- Re-establish bedtime and mealtime routines – It is easy to get into the summer schedule where everything seems to slide to later in the night. However, a couple of weeks before school starts, start moving things back. Have your child wake up at the time they normally would to start school and get them to bed so that they are getting enough sleep. Usually getting them up early makes it easier to get them to bed at night.
- Turn off the TV – Encourage your child to read, play quiet games, and/or color in the morning versus watching TV. This gets his/her mind active and ready to learn once school starts.
- Designate a clear place to do homework – This can be an activity you can do with your child and get their feedback. Of course your child's choice of the couch with the TV on will have to be vetoed. Try to find a place that is quiet and provide adequate space and light. Younger children may need to be closer to adults so they can be supervised and receive help and encouragement when needed.
- Select a spot to keep backpacks and lunch boxes – Stop the frantic morning routine of finding where the children have placed their belongings. Use the time before school starts to establish one place in the house where these belong and reward the kids when they put

things in their proper place. After a couple of weeks it will become a habit and no more treasure hunt mornings!

Preparing for a new school year can be filled with anxiety for children or at least some nervous energy. Get them a physical and mental health “tune up” and everything should be much smoother and your child will be ready to learn once the teaching begins!

Biography:

Dan Florell, Ph.D. is an assistant professor at Eastern Kentucky University and has a private practice, MindPsi ([www.mindpsi.net](http://www.mindpsi.net)). Praveena Salins, M.D. is a pediatrician at Madison Pediatric Associates ([www.madisonpeds.com](http://www.madisonpeds.com)).