



## Making your Mornings More Manageable



**G**etting out of the house on time with children dressed, teeth brushed, tummies filled and backpacks in hand can be challenging.

And doing it all without nagging, yelling and racing may seem impossible. But don't give up! You can create an environment that helps your child learn how to take responsibility for his or her morning routine, and leads to more pleasant interactions for everyone every morning.

The following steps to an effective, less stressful morning routine are relatively simple. You just have

to get everyone to follow them consistently. It won't happen overnight because old patterns are hard to break. But with time, effort and patience, you'll soon be seeing smoother, happier mornings.

1. **Decide what time you need to walk out the door in order to be on time.** Then make every effort to have everyone ready to go by that time. Provide countdown alerts to your child when your "walk-out" time is 15, 10 and 5 minutes away.
2. **Make a list of all the things your child needs to do from the time he or she wakes up until it is time to leave.** Think carefully about how much time each task takes to complete and make sure everyone is up early enough to get everything done without rushing.
3. **List the morning tasks in the order they are to be completed and post the list (possibly in two or three places) where your child can see it.** Use drawings and pictures to help younger children understand what they're supposed to do. The list could include:
 

a. Get dressed	e. Brush teeth
b. Brush hair	f. Put on a coat and grab the backpack next to the door
c. Eat breakfast	
d. Take medicine	
4. **With your child, identify a fun activity (which you must approve) he or she would enjoy doing if you complete all of your morning tasks and have spare time before leaving.** This might include watching TV, playing a video game or a game on the computer, playing with the dog, reading a book, listening to music or playing the piano. Write this activity (or draw a picture of it) at the bottom of the morning to-do list.

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5. Explain to your child that he or she is to complete each task on the list every morning and check them off as they are completed. Also explain that when every task is done, he or she gets to do the fun activity that is last on the list. For younger children, you can read each task, check it off together and then read what's next.
6. As your child works on and completes a task, provide specific praise. You may say things like "Just two more tasks and you get to watch TV" or "Wow, you are doing great! I bet you will have time to play the piano this morning."
7. When your child successfully finishes the list, make sure he or she gets to do the fun activity. If all the tasks don't get completed, he or she does not get to do the fun activity.
8. No matter how many tasks your child completes (all, a few or none), walk out the door on time! Your child may have to finish dressing in the car or go to school without breakfast or with messy hair. The key to making the list work is to not give in to the temptation to nag or scold or do tasks for your child.

Before starting this approach, it is a good idea to talk with your child's teachers and let them know you are doing this to improve his or her independence and sense of responsibility. That way, they'll understand why your child may arrive at school hungry or with messy hair on a few mornings. This shouldn't happen very often once your child figures out how to get through the morning routine successfully.

Planning and patience are the keys to making this strategy work. This is about teaching your child to take responsibility for getting ready for school as independently as possible. It's okay to help once in a while. But if you have to constantly remind or plead with your child to do the tasks, or help with or do them yourself, it won't take long before your behaviors become the morning routine and nagging, yelling and racing once again becomes the norm.



Above all, no matter what happens, remain patient and calm. Change takes time. Your encouragement and guidance will go a long way toward helping your family adopt a new, more pleasant morning routine!

## Additional Resources

- *Help! There's a Toddler in the House!* by Thomas M. Reimers, Ph.D.
- *I Brake For Meltdowns: How To Handle The Most Exasperating Behavior Of Your 2- To 5-Year-Old* by Michelle Nicholassen and Barbara O'Neal
- *Parenting the Strong-Willed Child: The Clinically Proven Five-Week Program for Parents of Two- to Six-Year-Olds* by Rex Forehand and Nicholas Long

➡ **For more information** or to make an appointment at the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, call **531-355-3358**.

Visit **BoysTown.org/Parenting** for more information from the parenting experts at Boys Town.