



Ending Morning Madness: Tips for Getting Children Ready in the Morning

by Chick Moorman and Thomas Haller

CHAOS is the word Barbara and Stanley Houston use to describe their typical weekday morning. Between getting themselves both ready for work and their two children ready to catch the bus, the Houstons have their hands full. Their two boys, ages seven and nine, “just won’t cooperate,” says Barbara. “They struggle to get up, dress slowly, and argue about what I serve for breakfast.” “I usually end up yelling,” Stanley says. “It’s an awful way to begin the day and leaves a bad taste in everyone’s mouth. I don’t know what else to do,” he adds apologetically.

What Barbara and Stanley don’t understand is that a successful morning does not begin in the morning. It begins in the evening with the parents taking time to purposefully design a plan of action. Whether it takes one evening or five, they need to design and implement a series of strategies over time. No one technique will make a major difference in their mornings. Several strategies, woven together to fit their particular needs and implemented with love and firmness, will help tremendously. We suggest they invest an evening considering the following tips for getting children ready in the morning.

1. **Establish a routine.** The brain of a child seeks routine and familiarity. A schedule that is specific and direct will help guide children through the morning. The schedule could include what time they will get up, the amount of time necessary to meet their personal hygiene needs in the bathroom, and the amount of time they will need to get dressed. It might also specify whether they will eat before or after they get dressed. The schedule should include specific times for each activity and be written down and posted. This way, children know what to expect and what is coming next. The idea is to provide a structural guide to keep them moving through the morning.
2. **Include children in the process of creating the schedule.** This builds ownership for the routine and leads to less resistance. It is more difficult to destroy something you helped build. Reevaluate the schedule and the times set for each activity periodically and make changes as needed. Involve your children in this reevaluation.
3. **Use the night before to set up a successful morning.** Teach your children to set an alarm. They can do this as early as first grade. The sooner you involve them in the process of waking themselves up, the better. Your goal is to make yourself dispensable by helping your children get themselves up and into the morning routine. This is about empowering children rather than controlling them.

4. **Lay out clothes the night before.** Make this a part of the evening routine. Check the calendar to see what is scheduled to take place at school the next day and what weather is expected. Lay out clothes accordingly. Consider using a five-level shelf in the closet with each day clearly marked. Clothes can then be chosen and laid out on Sunday night for the entire week. Adjustments can be made as the week progresses if the child wants to wear something different. However, all changes must take place the night before.
5. **Use the evening to pack the book bag and lunch box.** Searching through the house for school papers and books in the morning increases everyone's anxiety and leads to irritation and behavioral outbursts.
6. **Make sure your wake-up time is appropriate.** Allow enough time for a comfortable pace that fits you and your child. If your children are extremely tired in the morning, you may need to move to an earlier start time for the bedtime routine.
7. **Eat breakfast.** Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Breakfast gets the body going and gives it the energy needed to think and move through the first two to three hours. Resist the temptation to skip a nutritious breakfast.
8. **Keep the television off and screens on the shelf.** These distractions draw children's mind and energy away from the tasks at hand. Their focus needs to be on preparing the body and mind for a new day and all that is awaiting them!
9. **Model the message.** Use all these strategies for yourself as well. Your day is waiting for you as well and you want to be prepared. Your children will more likely flow through their schedule as they see and experience you moving gracefully through yours.

Wishing and hoping that mornings will be different will not change the chaos that Barbara and Stanley experience at the beginning of each weekday. Neither will demanding or threatening. A change will only occur when they invest the time to create a plan, implement it consistently, and relax into the new routine. Mornings can be peaceful if parents create them that way with intentionality and purpose. They and their family deserve it. How about you?

Chick Moorman and Thomas Haller are the authors of *The Parent Talk System*. The Parent Talk System is a comprehensive program designed to teach parents the *Language of Responsible Parenting*.

Kathy Salazar is your Parent Talk Facilitator and book distributor. For more information about how she can help you or your group meet your parenting needs visit www.practicalparenttalk.com today.



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