

## How to beat the morning rush



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Is morning a marathon at your house? You're not alone. Every morning across the country, busy families work against the clock to get kids dressed, fed, groomed, and out the door. For advice on easing the madness, we turned to parents, psychologists, and organization experts who have morning shortcuts they're happy to share.

### **It starts the night before**

*First things first:* Is your [child getting enough sleep](#)? Mornings are bound to be harder if kids are over-tired. Kids ages 3 to 5 need about 10 to 13 hours of sleep per night; it's 9 to 11 hours per night for kids 6 to 13, and for teenagers it's 8 to 10 hours per night. A sleepy kid of any age won't function at his best, so work backwards from your fixed morning deadline (school start, daycare drop-off, work arrival) to determine when lights-out should happen. If sleep quality is an issue, curb even trace amounts of afternoon or evening caffeine like chocolate, soda, chocolate milk, hot chocolate, and tea, and ban TV and video games before bed. Make sure older kids aren't up late texting, talking on the phone, or using social media, and if they are, institute a "no phones after 10 o'clock" (or whatever hour you think is reasonable) rule.

*A nightly list:* What tasks can you do the night before? There are the usual suspects: Pre-making lunch, choosing the next day's outfit (down to the shoes and accessories), repacking backpacks for the next day and placing all school items (even coats) by the door. But you can take it up a notch, too. If your kids can shower at night (depending on

their age and what they wear to school), have them sleep in the next day's outfit. "This strategy works well for little people who are slow to get rolling and [who tend to wear comfy t-shirts and shorts/sweats to school]," says mother of two [Angel Zobel-Rodriguez](#). Make-ahead breakfasts like yogurt parfaits and breakfast burritos can be put together while you're making dinner and stashed overnight – and for picky eaters, a sampling of pre-made options can help banish breakfast battles.

## **Time to wake up**

*When the alarm goes off:* How does your morning routine flow? Even amid chaos, there are patterns. One way to bring order to the madness is to break the routine into steps. A sticker chart with all of the daily to-dos, and specific rewards or consequences for each goal, can help motivate reluctant little ones to stay on task. Kids of all ages can benefit from a detailed discussion of everything that has to get accomplished every morning – but don't have this discussion in the middle of the morning rush! Schedule a time when everyone is relaxed, after dinner, for example, or on a weekend afternoon. During this review, be sure to question the order of things and take a collaborative, open-minded approach to creative solutions. Maybe your child should eat breakfast first so he's more alert while getting dressed, for example, or maybe face-washing first thing in the morning will do the trick.

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*If there's a car ride:* Can some tasks be re-zoned for the car? Everything from hairdos and shoe tying to reviewing spelling words and discussing goals for the day can be coupled with the morning commute.

*Share the drive:* If you drive your kids to school every day, consider organizing or joining a carpool. Carpools are a great way to share the driving, and it builds community at the same time. Email makes it easy to organize a schedule and alert each other if you need to switch days, etc.

*86 distractions:* Did you know that TV naturally slows many of us down? Even if it's the morning news, try turning it off and see if your household starts moving faster. Ditto for kids' computer games, video games, and Facebook updates.

## **Become morning people**

*Create morning zen:* Could you get up earlier? For many people it's a stretch. But blogger [Lisa B. Marshall](#), mother of 6-year-old twins, makes a nice case for an earlier –

and highly organized, yet tranquil — morning. First, she gets up before everyone else for a little time to herself. Next, she asks her kids to get up early enough to be ready 30 minutes before the bus comes so they get a little quiet time for reading or drawing prior to school. How does she do it? “I use a checklist to help me keep my sanity,” she writes. “Since I ask the same things every day, my kids know the list mostly by heart.” She’s got an “upstairs list” for clothes and grooming, and a “downstairs list” for backpacks and lunches. After to-dos have been done and quiet time, she has one final list: “Do you have your respect and dignity?” she asks, followed by questions about compassion, empathy, and helping others.

You may not be able (or willing) to build in as much extra time as Marshall does, but setting the alarm clock even 15 minutes earlier may be worth the loss of sleep if it means a calmer, more organized start to each day.