

Q & A: Getting kids up in the morning
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Question: My kids are 11 and 14. The issue I have is getting them up and out the door on school mornings. Weekends don't seem to be a problem, especially when they have things they want to leave early for, but it's a real hassle on school mornings getting them to the bus on time so I can get to work on schedule. I don't even ask them to make their beds in the morning -- I'm just glad if they get dressed and brush their teeth. What can I do to make this less stressful? I'm a single mother and that makes it even harder.

Answer: It is tougher when you are the only parent in the household on school mornings. The fact remains, though, that certain things still need to be done. You face two issues here – organization and motivation – and they are even more important if you are a single parent. Let's take them one at a time:

Organization

I suggest that you try to organize the morning chores as much as possible the evening before so that things go more smoothly when your kids wake up.

If at all possible try to get the kids to put their clothes out the night before, make and refrigerate their lunches (if they don't buy them), as well as packing the book bag so that it can be grabbed up the next morning on the way out.

In addition, I suggest holding off serving breakfast until everything else is done. By putting breakfast as the last part of the morning ritual they seem to stay on the “getting ready for school” routine more easily. Also, if the kids are running late they can at least grab a breakfast bar or nutritional snack to eat on the way to school. (Hopefully this will not become their breakfast of choice every day, but many children will dawdle at breakfast and miss the bus or cause you to be late to work.)

Making beds should probably be optional (though it does help in establishing discipline), however, you should insist on personal hygiene such as brushing teeth and hair as well as washing hands and face in the morning. In this regard, many families find that bathing the night before helps out tremendously the next morning when just a quick touch up will do.

Motivation:

Getting them organized the night before, asking, persuading and nagging, of course, will likely only get you so far. In order to speed things up, you may wish to consider negative consequences if your children consistently are fooling around and/or making you late for work due to their dawdling.

Appropriate reactions might be to give the following negative consequences each afternoon/evening that they are not ready at the preset time:

Loss of all "electronics privileges" (T.V., phone, stereo, etc) for the day.

Going to bed earlier so that they can get up more easily in the morning in order to have more time to get ready.

Withdrawal of another treasured privilege such as going out to play.

Dr. Peters' Bottom Line:

If your kids see that there is a downside for their lack of organization then they will be motivated to try harder to meet time limits in the future.