

Making It a Good Day

“You really can nudge your whole being in a better direction each day.”

~ Rick Hanson, Ph.D., and Richard Mendius, MD, from
Buddha’s Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom

REMEMBER THE OLD ADAGE about starting the day on the “right foot”? We can launch our children and ourselves into a wonderful day by paying attention to our state of mind before going out the door. Over the years, parents have told me the secrets to getting the day off to a good start. Here are some ideas:

Begin the day with love. One mom I know brings her teenager a cup of tea in bed to start the day. Many parents have found that snuggling with a child before he has to get out of bed transforms everyone’s mood.

Take time to think happy thoughts. Positive thoughts release soothing chemicals in the brain. Taking a few minutes to talk about something fun you are going to do with your child after pick-up can help her have an upbeat attitude about going off to school.

Get up on time. Allowing extra time cuts down the stress of rushing and feeling like you are going to be late. Allow extra time so that you can arrive at school in a relaxed state and still be punctual.

Resolve anger issues before saying good-bye. Married couples are warned “Never go to bed angry.” The same principle works for beginning the day. Try not to send children to school worried you are angry at them. It’s easy to get upset with children in the morning—for dawdling, not eating, not getting dressed, losing things—but creating a good mood ensures a child’s well-being.

Children need us to show that we have released any anger we have about a disagreement as soon as a frustrating situation has ended. Common knowledge tells us that children do best when they start the day and end it with love. The wisdom of the age-old marriage motto is that when conflicts go unresolved before sleep (or starting a new day), the remaining bad feelings nag at people’s consciousness and keep them from being fully attentive. Take a few minutes to resolve any difficult feelings.

Tell them what to expect. Children also feel safe when they feel informed. They like to know *when* you’re coming to get them (for young children, you can say “after lunch” or “after rest time” rather than giving a specific time), *who* is picking them up, *what* they have in their lunch, and *what* is on the agenda for after school. Being “in the know” helps children feel centered. It’s not always apparent how much children appreciate having predictable ideas about how their day will go.

Trust their abilities to flourish. Even if you have to say good-bye when your child feels grumpy or sad, try to hold an image of her recovering her positive self quickly while you are on your way. Picturing your child feeling safe and loved will help both of you to take advantage of all the opportunities for happiness that the day provides.

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