

## Getting Out the Door on Time

Dr. Matt Sanders

As another new school year begins, many parents may be looking forward to the return of a bit of order around the family home. While holidays can be fun, it is usually the case that by the time school rolls around many parents will have just about exhausted their repertoire of activities designed to keep children amused.

Of course, the return of school also means the return of the morning ritual of an entire household simultaneously going about its business waking up, getting cleaned and dressed, eating and racing out the door on time.

This morning rush hour can sometimes be complicated by the tendency of some children to be persistently slow, demanding, or just plain forgetful right when you need them to be most cooperative and on the ball.

Younger children may choose this time to run away, hide, refuse to get dressed, or simply sit down and whine. Older children may just seem disorganized, requiring reminders every step of the way, several times — “Have you brushed your teeth? Have you been to the toilet? Do you have your school bag? Did you put your homework in your bag?”

The combination of this behavior and the time pressures you may already feel, especially if you slept in a little, can quickly result in a bout of shouting, resentment, and a mini pitched battle between you and your child.

So just how do you cope with a child who is difficult to get organized when you are going out?

The key to overcoming this dawdling behavior is organization — and the place to start is your own organization first. You need to setup an effective routine. For example, if you need to leave by 8:15 am at the latest, don't try getting out of bed at 7:30 am when you know it takes an hour to get ready.

I have known some parents who are habitually late in bringing children to organized activities such as preschool, parties or to play at other children's homes. Not only does this make a prime breeding ground for time pressures on both child and parent, it also shortens the time a child has to enjoy outings like these. It also doesn't present a very good role model to your children, particularly since they will watch what you do as well as listen to what you say.

So the rule is to get yourself ready first, before your child. To avoid last minute rushing prepare some things the night before and go to bed at a reasonable hour so you will wake up early. Any time you can spare by being ready early gives you more time to deal with any disruptions from your children.

I would also recommend against having the television on first thing in the morning when preparing to go out. This can be very disruptive. Better to make sure the children are dressed before breakfast and make any television watching dependent on being fully ready to leave.

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Healthy children—body, heart and mind.

Make sure you let your child know ahead of time that you will be going out and that they know exactly what the day's activities will be and their time requirements. This preparation should avoid the situation where a rushed call to a child glued in front of a television set or video game console is met with absolute indifference or a dismissive "in a minute."

Younger children can help learn the importance of organization by becoming involved in the process of getting ready rather than simply having everything done for them. Children who have learned how to get dressed by themselves not only have a chance to practice such independent skills, but help Mom or Dad save time by doing it themselves.

Even with all this organization and forethought, some children will need a little more time and effort to learn how to get ready on time. In these cases I would suggest using the "beat the clock" game. This involves setting your child a goal of being ready before the alarm clock sounds off at a set time. If your child wins, he earns a small treat or reward for his efforts, such as a favorite snack in his lunch box.

Use a kitchen timer or something similar and tell your child exactly what tasks they must do to be ready to leave and that if they can do all of these before the alarm rings they will get a reward. Make sure you set the timer for a reasonable amount of time and avoid giving repeated instructions or nagging your child to hurry up.

Often it will only take a two-week period of beating the clock before first the rewards and then the clock itself are phased out. Remember to always offer praise for your child's achievements in attempting to learn better organization.

While you never want to become too time conscious, good organization, particularly in the mornings, certainly helps. Everything runs a touch smoother if all family members know how to pull their weight.

**Dr. Matthew Sanders is a clinical psychologist at the University of Queensland in Australia and founder of the Triple P – Positive Parenting Program.**

*For local resources on Positive Parenting support for common behavior issues such as tantrums, whining, disobedience, bedtime problems and more contact Raise & Shine at 707-463-1233 or visit [www.raiseandshine.org](http://www.raiseandshine.org) for a schedule of free workshops, classes and private consultations in your area.*