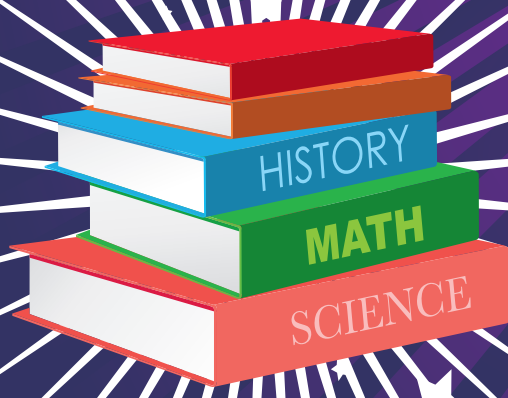




Back-to-School

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How Often Do Kids Need Eye Exams

Many people expect their vision to fade as they grow older. Such expectations are not unfounded, as the National Eye Institute notes that certain vision changes, including diminished vision and difficulty distinguishing colors, are a normal part of aging. But even children can experience changing vision, which only highlights the importance of kids receiving routine eye exams. Eye examination frequency depends on the age of the child and the condition of his or her eyesight at the time of each exam. The American



Optometric Association has established these guidelines for pediatric eye examination frequency to help parents know when to get their youngsters' vision checked.

BIRTH TO 2 YEARS
Children in this age group whose physicians have deemed them asymptomatic of potential eye conditions or at low risk of developing eye conditions should have their eyes examined sometime between six and 12 months of age. Kids who may be at risk should adhere to the same schedule, though the AOA notes that exams for at-risk children may need to be conducted more frequently, even in this age group, than kids who are symptom-free. Eye doctors will speak with parents and recommend an eye exam schedule based on their initial examination.

3 THROUGH 5 YEARS
Children between the ages of three and five who are at low risk of developing eye conditions should have their eyes examined at least once between their third and fifth birthdays. The same goes for kids who are at risk, though doctors may recommend more frequent examinations for such youngsters.

6 THROUGH 18 YEARS
Whether they are at risk of eye conditions or not, children between the ages of six and 18 should have their eyes examined before first grade and annually thereafter. Youngsters who are at risk may need more frequent examinations as they get older.

Eye examinations are an important component of child health-care. By adhering to AOA eye examination guidelines, parents can ensure any vision problems their children develop are quickly caught and can be treated before they adversely affect youngsters' lives.

Music Education Boosts More Than Test Scores

School is much more than a place where students gather to learn. For children, school is their first opportunity for social development and introduction to people outside of their family unit. Lessons learned in school go beyond mathematics and language arts. Students learn to cultivate individual interests and find other people who share their interests. Music is one of the ways like-minded children come together. When many people talk about the benefits of music education, they're quick to point out all of the quantitative and measurable results of that music education. For instance, numerous studies have shown the positive impact music programs can have on children in other areas of study. Dr. Laurel Trainor, a professor of psychology, neuroscience and behavior at McMaster University, has said that young children who take music lessons show different brain development and improved memory compared to children who do not receive musical training.

Stanford University researchers have found that musical training improves how the brain processes the spoken word, a finding that researchers say could lead to improving the reading ability of children who have dyslexia and other reading problems. Furthermore, in an analysis of data on more than 25,000 secondary school students, researchers at the United States Department of Education found that students who report consistent involvement in instrumental music during middle school and high school perform significantly better in mathematics by grade 12 than those who do not participate in music programs. There are many reasons why music education can help to make a child a better student, but there also are other benefits that go beyond the classroom environment. Being involved in music also is a social endeavor, and music education can set the course for lifelong friends and help create social groups that

last through school and beyond. Music education breeds familiarity during a school career, when going from class to class or from school to school every year can be nerve-racking and unfamiliar. Walking inside of a band room, whether in elementary school or high school, can create a sense of belonging. It is also a place where students not involved in sports or other activities can gather. Children who move a lot due to a parent's work may find that joining the marching band or participation in the choir is the one portion of school that is familiar no matter where they attend school. While neighborhoods may change and teachers differ from school to school, music can be a reliable constant. While not every child will go on to be the next, great musical sensation, thanks to music education at school, he or she will have learned lessons in working as a team and other social benefits that will help in all areas of life.

How To Buy School Clothes Without Busting Your Budget

Parents often note that kids seem to grow like weeds. Pants that once reached to the tops of a youngster's feet quickly become too short, while once-loose shirts may soon become too snug. Many parents find themselves regularly in children's clothing departments stocking up on the basics, which can put quite a dent in already stretched-thin budgets. Although children's wardrobes are added to at various times of the year, the bulk of shopping occurs just before the school year begins. Though clothing can be expensive, families need not bust their budgets when shopping for kids' clothing. By shopping smart and concentrating on fashion staples, it's easier to stretch money further. * Spread out purchases. Shopping early allows parents to make the most of sales. Warm weather clothing generally goes on sale in July to make room for new fall lines. Considering the first few months of school still may be warm, short-sleeved shirts will still have utility and are generally less expensive than sweaters and sweatshirts. Staggering purchases also enables parents to develop a

clothing allowance each and every month instead of having one large bill at a certain point in the year. Parents can even add to their children's wardrobes during the holiday season, when clothes tend to get reduced again for holiday sales. * Don't discount hand-me-downs. It's trendy to recycle clothing and also to be environmentally conscious by putting items to good use again and again. Aside from you and your wallet, no one will know if your child is wearing a secondhand pair of pants or a brand new pair. Many school moms are anxious to swap clothing with others to lessen their own financial burdens with children's clothing. Start a clothing swap with a group of friends, and you may find you have more than you need in the way of clothes for the kids. * Take stock of what you already have. How many times have you run out to the grocery store for a missing ingredient only to find that very item buried at the back of the pantry? The same thing happens with kids' clothes. Before taking kids clothes shopping, take inventory of their closets. Have little

ones try on clothes to see which items still fit and which can be discarded or donated. Make a list of the items you need to cut down on impulse spending at the store. * Invest in the right high-quality pieces. Spending a fortune for a trendy pair of pants that may end up getting ruined on the playground is not the best way to shop for kids' clothing. However, investing in a quality pair of shoes that will last much of the year is a good investment. Know when to splurge and when it's okay to shop at the discount store. * Stock up on staples. A straight-leg cut of jeans, some solid colored polo shirts and an A-line dress or skirt are some classic foundation pieces for children's wardrobes. Such items tend to last longer than trendy items that may only last a few months before the next trend arrives. * Learn to layer. Layering items can make pieces look like new by putting them together in different combinations. Layering a summer T-shirt under a fall hoodie gets use out of two different season's worth of clothes. It also enables kids to be comfortable during unpredictable weather.

What's the Difference?

There are four things different between Picture A and Picture B. Can you find them all?

A



B



Answers: 1. Missing glasses on wall 2. Extra statue in background 3. Picture frame is empty 4. Boy's shirt is all one color



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Manage Hectic School Mornings

If a typical school morning sees your family rushing around and out the door with nary a moment to spare, only to be left feeling like you ran a marathon by 9 am, a new approach to your routine might be necessary.

Mornings, especially in households in which parents who work outside of the home and have one or two kids requiring drop-off at their respective schools, can often be hectic. Starting off the morning feeling harried and stressed can carry over into the mood of the day, affecting productivity as a result.

According to Dr. David Anderson, PhD, senior director of the ADHD and Disruptive Behavior Disorders Center at the Child Mind Institute, busy mornings can be the most stressful moments of the day. Homework hour and getting prepared for bed are other typically stressful times of the day for families. If less stressful mornings are a goal for your family, try these strategies.

START THE NIGHT BEFORE - Doing as much preparatory work the evening before can make quite a difference in taming hectic mornings. Things that can be done in advance include checking and stocking backpacks, signing paperwork, making lunches, setting out clothing, showering, and having breakfast foods ready to go.

ESTABLISH A 'LAUNCH PAD' - Ann Dolin, a Virginia-based education specialist, suggests having a launch pad, or a place where all school-related items are prepped and stored. It can be a basket, box or another container big enough to contain school items. Children can drop and pick up the items as needed.

MAKE THE ROUTINE THE BOSS - Positive Parenting Solutions founder Amy McCready says families can implement a "when-then" routine that sets the tone for the morning. "When everyone is dressed, hair combed, breakfast eaten, and school supplies packed, then you can watch 10 minutes of an educational cartoon." This puts the routine in control rather than making the parents the bad guys.

MAKE KIDS RESPONSIBLE! - Too often parents add more stress to their plates by showing up at school with forgotten lunch boxes or band instruments. Instead, parents can stop rescuing their children and help train them to be more responsible, an essential trait.

CHART WAKE-UP TIMES - It may seem like micromanaging, but scheduling wake-up and bathroom times can help everyone know where they should be and when they should be there. It also helps avoid bottleneck situations in the bathroom or kitchen.

Keep morning madness to a minimum with some simple strategies.

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