

# Back to school? Here's how to manage the balance

With kids now back at school and kinder, it can be stark reminder for families that a summer spent lounging on the beach, napping in the afternoon, and eating and drinking at all hours has truly come to an end.

It doesn't have to be a jarring return to work, though. All you need is a good routine and a little careful planning to manage the balance.

- **Homework.** Find a homework routine that works well for your family, and get into good habits from the start of the year. It may mean sitting down with your little ones as they complete their homework, or simply making yourself available for older children if they have questions. Dedicating around 30 minutes to an hour for homework time each afternoon or evening will ensure it gets done without interfering too much with valuable family time.

Get your kids involved in choosing the routine, and talk about whether it's best to get homework done straight after school, following an hour play break, or after dinner. Setting up some kind of reward system for younger children can help keep them motivated and excited about doing their homework, and sharing what they've learned.

- **Lunches.** Organising school lunches can be a real chore if you're scrambling through the pantry five minutes before the bus is about to arrive, and it often means your own lunch for work is forgotten, and purchased at the less than desirable café next door. Resolve to be organised this school year with a little forward planning, and to make your own lunch while you pack for the kids.

Pack lunches the night before, so you can simply grab them and go in the morning. This might mean swapping sandwiches for cheese and crackers, or making salad wraps that are less likely to go soggy overnight.

- **Family time.** Life can become a bit of a whirlwind between work priorities, after-school activities and making sure school uniforms are clean, so be sure to work some family time into your weekly routine. Quality time can mean different things for different families, but you might consider:

- Turning off the TV at dinner time and spending that half-hour each night talking about the highlights of the school day

- Pencilling in an adventure afternoon for a few hours every Sunday, where you and the

kids explore a new local park or attraction

- A weekly excursion to visit some relatives

- Monthly board-game nights, where mobile phones and other devices are switched off

- Fortnightly doona days watching a movie on DVD together

- A simple nightly bedtime routine, where the whole family reads a book together before the little ones go to sleep