



Ann Douglas is an award-winning writer and the author of 27 books, including the bestselling *The Mother of All Pregnancy Books*, *The Mother of All Baby Books*, *The Mother of All Toddler Books*, *The Mother of All Parenting Books*, and *The Mother of All Pregnancy Organizers*. You can find book excerpts, articles, tip sheets, and more by visiting Ann's website at www.having-a-baby.com.

Back-to-School Survival Guide

by Ann Douglas

Hey, moms and dads, it's back-to-school time again—that crazy time of year when you might as well just camp out in the mall parking lot rather than drive back and forth across town in an unending quest for back-to-school essentials. (Of course, if you've got a kid in that delightful pre-teen age bracket, I-have-to-visit-all-the-malls-in-town-before-I-purchase-a-single-item-of-clothing stage, you'll have to rethink your strategy a little to allow for multiple treks to multiple malls.) Just remember, folks, you can't win immunity until the end of September, so pace yourselves. Here are some tips on surviving the Mother of All Challenges—back-to-school time!

1. **Start your back-to-school shopping early.** You know that old expression “The early bird gets the worm”? I never really understood what it was all about until I became a parent frantically sifting through the picked-over rubble in the school supplies section of the local department store in a futile attempt to find a pencil case of a particular style and color. It's at that moment that you truly appreciate the importance of being an early bird.
2. **Establish the shopping ground rules before you hit the mall.** Your negotiating power goes down the drain after a couple of hours of shopping. At that point, you're willing to buy just about anything your kid wants just to make the pain of listening to the really bad music they play in the hippest clothing stores stop. That's why it's important to establish your kids' clothing budget long before you leave home and to mutually agree on the number and price of outfits to be purchased beforehand. It's your only hope of coming out of this experience financially unscathed.
3. **Encourage your kids to hold back some of their clothing budget until after they start school.** If you let your kids buy all their back-to-school clothes before they find out what all “the cool kids” are wearing, they could end up with a closet full of brand new clothes that will be labeled “uncool” by mid-September.
4. **Take advantage of the start of a new school year to rethink family routines.** We may celebrate New Year's Eve on January 1st, but it's September that marks the start of a new year if you've got school-aged kids. So take advantage of that decidedly “New Year's” spirit to renegotiate chores, allowances, extra-curricular schedules, closet clean-outs, and so on.

5. **Start adjusting your kids' bedtimes before school begins.** Otherwise, your kids will end up suffering from the academic equivalent of jet lag—the result of too many late nights and late mornings! (Hey, it's not exactly reasonable to expect a kid who's been sleeping in until 11:00 a.m. all summer to be functional at 7:00 a.m. on the first day of school!)
6. **Don't overdo things on the Labor Day weekend.** The last thing you want to do is have your kids heading off to school feeling totally fried, so save that 1000 km roundtrip visit to Grandma until another weekend. Besides, you'll need time to load up on lunch box essentials and after school snacks, something that's pretty hard to do if you're pulling into the driveway at midnight the night before school starts.
7. **Keep your evenings as free as possible during the first week of school.** Not only do you need to leave time in your schedule to squeeze in all those unpredictable errands that have to be run that first week—like dashing out to load up on whatever school supplies the teachers forgot to tell your kids about ahead of time or spending an hour in line so that you can sign your kids up for swimming lessons!—you also need to be available to listen to your kids as they bring you up to speed on all those exciting first-week developments.
8. **Plan to cut corners when it comes to making meals.** You have enough other things on your plate without having to worry about, well, what's on your plate! Order in pizza, pick up subs on your way home from work, or reheat that mystery casserole that's been languishing in the back of your freezer. The nutrition police won't book you for cutting corners in the kitchen one week of the year.
9. **Take care of your own needs.** It's easy to spend the entire month of September running around at breakneck speed, picking up school supplies, signing your kids up for extra-curricular activities, and making the rounds of school open houses and picnics. Don't forget to take time for yourself during this crazy time of year. Otherwise, you could find yourself feeling supremely grumpy by the time the month draws to a close.
10. **Set some parenting goals for yourself for the upcoming year.** Do you want to play a more active role at your kids' school, be a little more enthusiastic when it comes to helping them with their homework (groan!), or make a point of communicating with their teachers on a regular basis? While your kids are busy setting some academic goals for themselves, you should take a moment to set some objectives for yourself as a parent. Who knows? Maybe you'll surprise yourself and achieve straight As.

This is one in a series of tip sheets available for download from www.having-a-baby.com. Schools, PTA associations, and other organizations that work with parents are welcome to distribute these materials to their clients provided that each tip sheet is reproduced in its entirety, including this copyright notice. To inquire about other uses of this material, please contact the copyright holder:

Page One Productions Inc.
3108 Frances Stewart Road
Peterborough, Ontario
K9H 7J8 Canada
Fax: 705-742-9672
ann@having-a-baby.com

The Mother of All® is a registered trademark of Page One Productions Inc.