



Calmer Mornings: 5 Positive Parenting Strategies

Simple, practical strategies to reduce morning stress and help your child thrive at school



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Why Positive Parenting Matters

School mornings can quickly become stressful for both parents and children. When children feel rushed, they may become less cooperative, leading to conflict (Selman & Dilworth-Bart, 2024).

Research shows that children are more likely to cooperate and regulate their emotions when routines are **predictable**, expectations are **clear**, and parents respond **calmly** (Sanders et al., 2012).

By applying evidence-based positive parenting strategies, you can reduce morning stress and help your child thrive at school.

Evidence-Based Strategies

1. Establish a Consistent Morning Routine

Children need predictability to feel safe and secure. When parents establish a consistent morning routine, it creates clear expectations and reduces uncertainty.

Actionable Tips:

- Create a **visual schedule** using pictures or words for each step of the routine (e.g., wake up, get dressed, eat breakfast, brush teeth).
- **Display** the schedule in a common area (e.g., kitchen, living room).
- **Prompt** your child to check the schedule instead of repeating instructions (e.g., “*What’s next on your schedule?*”).

2. Reinforce Positive Behaviour Immediately

Children are more likely to repeat behaviours that lead to desirable outcomes. When parents provide immediate reinforcement of positive behaviours, it strengthens motivation and encourages cooperation.

Actionable Tips:

- Provide **specific praise** whenever your child completes a step independently (e.g., “*I love how you got dressed without any reminders!*”).
- Use a **reward system** to acknowledge consistent effort (e.g., sticker charts, points). Let your child help **choose the reward** to ensure it is motivating and meaningful.

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3. Connect Before You Direct

Children have a strong need for connection. When parents take a moment to connect before giving an instruction, it helps to meet emotional needs and increases willingness to cooperate.

Actionable Tips:

- Start the day with brief, **non-verbal affection** (e.g., hug, cuddle, pat on the back).
- **Acknowledge feelings** before giving an instruction (e.g., *"I know it's cozy in bed. Let's get you some breakfast to help you wake up."*).
- Spend **one minute talking** about something enjoyable (e.g., *"What are you excited to do at recess today?"*).

4. Use Calm, Clear Instructions

Children respond best when expectations are communicated calmly and clearly. When parents use calm, clear instructions, it reduces confusion and models appropriate emotional regulation skills.

Actionable Tips:

- **Model calmness** by keeping your facial expression and voice tone neutral.
- Use **short, simple phrases** (e.g., *"Please put your shoes on"* instead of *"How many times do I have to ask you to put your shoes on?"*).
- Frame instructions **positively** (e.g., *"Please walk inside"* instead of *"Don't run"*).
- Allow 5 - 10 seconds of **processing time** before repeating an instruction.

5. Prepare the Night Before

Planning ahead reduces stress and prevents common triggers (e.g., rushing, last-minute changes). By addressing these logistical needs the evening before, parents create a calm environment that is conducive to cooperation.

Actionable Tips:

- **Prepare** essentials the evening before (e.g., lay out clothes, make lunches, pack bag).
- **Involve your child** in preparations to give a sense of control (e.g., let them choose their outfit, or pack their own backpack).
- Review the **schedule for the following day** so that your child is aware of what is expected.

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Implementing the Strategies

Consistency is key to making these strategies effective. Research shows that when parents apply strategies reliably, children are more likely to benefit (Strauss et al., 2012).

Practical Reminders:

- **Start small.** Choose one or two strategies that you feel would make the biggest impact on your family.
- **Commit for two weeks.** Apply your chosen strategies every morning for at least two weeks to allow new habits to form.
- **Acknowledge progress.** Positive change is a gradual process, and every step forwards counts as success.

Need More Support?

If you're ready for more personalised guidance, book a free 15-minute consultation to discuss how I can support your family's unique needs at www.marievandenbroeke.com.

References

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