



## The Healthy Kids Series

# Balancing Your Healthy Family

| BY TAMI FARAM |

**G**etting the kids ready for school while you are preparing for your own day can be chaotic. From the time you get the children out of bed to moment they walk out the door, so many things can, and do, go wrong. Just as someone is searching for homework or needing lunch packed, the dog runs by and chaos erupts in a moment's notice!

Though you cannot prevent everything that interrupts your morning flow, there are steps you can take to improve your family's overall routine. Here are some suggestions:

• **Follow the same routine each day.**

Many experts agree that young children especially benefit from a regular schedule that guides them as they grow. Routines enable your children to know what to expect each day and help you keep things rolling.

• **Wake up before the kids.**

Many moms and dads prefer to rise earlier than their kids.

"I get ready each morning before my kids so I can help them get breakfast, prepare lunch and get them to the school bus on time," says Carrie Henman, mother of three girls. With her daughters ranging in age from 15 to 7, Henman maintains a busy schedule that allows for each after-school activity and sport.

• **Don't stress the small stuff.**

Although neatness and organization are important skills to teach kids, don't stress if all of the beds are not made or if everyone is not able to eat breakfast together.

"I don't make big, hot breakfasts anymore," admits Colleen Wells, mother of two and a local teacher. "I give [the kids] a combination of prepared foods and fruit and milk. I keep it simple."

• **Lay out clothes the night before.**

Many parents also discover they struggle less when they set younger children's clothes out the night before school. This eliminates wardrobe fights the next morning.

"I remember being jealous of parents whose kids wore uniforms to school," says Irma Cogdill a mother of four living in Woodbridge, VA. "I had many moments when I fought my girls over what they would wear to school," says Cogdill. "I found I needed to take time to communicate with them before our week began. But I also wanted to give them the freedom to select their own clothes."

Allowing teens to do as much as they can for themselves is important. Creating a balance for your kids is as important as creating a balance for yourself. Encourage your kids to start the New Year by setting new goals. Whether they need to become more organized with school work, sports, their room at home or even outside activities, it's never too late to teach them that goals lead to success.

The Marine Corps Marathon's annual Healthy Kids Fun Run is a great way to motivate elementary to middle-school-aged children to set goals. The one-mile fun run is open to students of all skill levels from ages 6 to 13. Even those who have not raced before can set a personal goal to make it to the finish! Each child who

participates is awarded a medal for achieving the goal.

"I think it's much easier to be active when you have a goal in mind," says Abigail Albers who started setting goals after participating in her first Healthy Kids Fun Run at age 9. Now 12, Albers is racing with her dad in some of the Marine Corps Marathon's (MCM) larger events, like the MCM 10K and the Marine Corps Historic Half marathon races.

• **Setting goals can improve your child's desire to be better organized.**

According to Donna Goldberg, author of *The Organized Student: Teaching Students Skills for Success for School and Beyond*, organization is a learned skill. "Just because parents are organized does not mean their children will be organized," says Greenberg, who is a contributor to [www.firstthings.org](http://www.firstthings.org), a non-profit site dedicated to strengthening families through education, mobilization and communication.

Goldberg suggests the old adage, "kids learn by example" is not always true.

"In many instances I see parents who expect their children to learn organizational skills just by watching," she says. "Just modeling a particular behavior does not ensure teens are learning it. We have to break it down for them step by step. In the process of breaking it down,

parents need to remember that just because a certain way of doing things works for them it does not mean the same system will work for their teen."

Goldberg also suggests that parents should "recognize the way they [teens] are organized and let them know you are confident they can apply it to other areas of their life."

• **Make sure everybody knows organization is a process that occurs over time.**

"There will be missteps along the way," says Goldberg. "As you consistently work the process, teens begin to internalize the system."

Though it may seem impossible to find the perfect balance for your entire family, setting goals, recognizing your kids' successes, opening the lines of communication and providing a supportive environment may be all the balance they really need. [wFm](http://wFm)

Articles in the Healthy Kids Series are presented by the Marine Corps Marathon Healthy Kids Fun Run to be held on October 30, 2010. The one-mile run welcomes children ages 6-13. Learn more about the Healthy Kids Fun Run at [www.marinemarathon.com](http://www.marinemarathon.com).



Tami Faram is the Community Relations Coordinator for the Marine Corps Marathon. No federal or Marine Corps endorsement is implied.