

Crabby's back-to-school tips for parents

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Crabby Office Lady

It seems the school year just ended, but soon it will be time to begin a new one. (And if you're in year-round school, well, it never ends!) To all parents out there who are facing the daunting task of getting everyone ready: This week's column is for you.

A couple of years ago, I introduced you to three teachers whose minds are already set on the upcoming school year. (Look at the **See also** box at the top of this column to go to those columns.) This week, it's all about you parents and how you can start to switch focus from swimming lesson carpools and day camp schedules to soccer practice carpools and school schedules (not to mention supplies, new teachers, and packing young kids off to school the first time).

My confession: I'm not an expert at parenting. (Just who exactly is? All those self-proclaimed experts who write all those parenting books?) However, I *am* a mother, and I know that a little preparation can go a long way when it comes to getting ready for the school year. It's difficult to just jump right into new school shoes when you've been going barefoot all summer long, if you get my gist. But if you know where to go and how to get there, you can get organized for everything from your kid's kindergarten supply list to anticipating her college application. This week's column is all about helping with that.

Back to school

When you're a parent, you discover — eventually — that being organized is key to surviving the day-to-day joys and challenges of having kids. I used to make (and then promptly lose) list upon list — scribbled on whatever scrap of paper I could find — of school supplies, carpoolers' numbers, and so on. You can save yourself time and confusion with list and calendar templates. In fact, we have templates for just about anything you (or I) need.

- [Elementary school supply list](#)
- [Back-to-school checklist](#)
- [Academic year calendars](#)

Your family's personal information

I don't know about you, but when I send my very young daughter off to school, it is with a mix of joy and trepidation. I have the same feelings when I leave her with a sitter for the evening. What if something happens? What if I can't be found?

You can put your fears to rest a little by just making sure that your family's emergency information is gathered together in a format that is easy to read, easy to change, and easily available. I use the following templates to share vital information with sitters, teachers, and even grandparents. This way, I don't have to wonder if any of these people know who my daughter's pediatrician is, that she is NOT allergic to peas (contrary to what she might tell them), and that she is not allowed to watch more than one half-hour of TV a day (again, contrary to what she might tell them).

- [Child's emergency contact and medical information](#)
- [Community sports emergency contact list](#)
- [Emergency contact list](#)

After-school fun

Part of being a kid — one of the best parts if you ask me — is the myriad of after-school activities. You know, soccer, gymnastics, music lessons, and so on. And part of being the parent of a kid who does these activities is the carpooling (not one of the best parts, if you ask me), being the snack mother for the week, and keeping track of who has a T-ball game this week and who has a swim meet. (Note to self: Swimmers have different uniforms than T-ballers. I don't want my daughter ending up on the field with a swim cap instead of a batter's helmet, and my son in the pool with a soggy glove. How about I — or maybe you? — create a template for who needs which gear?)

Although, yes, this falls under the "back-to-school" umbrella, after-school activities have their own sort of organizational feel to them. It isn't about lists and calendars, per se; it's more about rosters, schedules, and making sure everyone is fed.

- [Snack schedule for sports team](#)
- [Pocket schedule for youth sports \(fall months\)](#)
- [Team roster](#)

In the school and community

Getting involved in your child's school is something that just about every parent is required to do. But not only that, it can be a great way to get to know your children's teachers and school administrators, and meet other parents (to share horror stories, of course).

- [Pump up your PTA publicity](#)
- [PTA agenda](#)
- [PTA minutes](#)
- [Membership database](#)

Communicate with teachers and administrators

I think that one of the most important things you can do to ensure your children's success in school is to make sure that you keep the lines of communication open between you and their teachers. Sometimes you just want to say thanks, while other times you need to complain. We have templates for just about anything you want to say (even if you don't have the nerve to say it).

- [Thank you to teacher for helping child \(elementary\)](#)

When they're college-bound

Your little chick is about to leave the nest. Your baby's almost a grown-up. In other words, the dream of that sewing room or home office you always wanted is about to come true, and you're going to have full-time access to your car again (not that it matters since you'll soon be making the choice between tuition and gas).

Three and a half years ago, I wrote a column called [Crabby is your college research advisor](#) for college-bound seniors. I offered ideas about how to use Office to undertake the tasks of writing to colleges, creating resumes, and even creating a FrontPage Web site to act as your online spokesperson.

For this column, I'm going to cut right to the chase and send you parents to the best college-related templates we have. From figuring out how much a state college versus an Ivy League college will cost you to advising how to write to schools and get information, we have everything you need (except the actual cash, of course).

- [College costs calculator](#)
- [College comparison worksheet](#)
- [Request for college application materials](#)

As well, this Web page, [Get a head start on researching colleges](#), offers a veritable treasure trove of links to resources that will help you and your child get started on the next phase of her life.

"My mother had a great deal of trouble with me, but I think she enjoyed it." — Mark Twain

About the author

[Annik Stahl](#), the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Did this article help you?** feedback tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.