

376 - The Lazy Genius Back-to-School Checklist

Hi there! You're listening to the Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't.

Today is Episode 376 - The Lazy Genius Back-to-School Checklist. August is almost here, and when it hits, it hits hard, especially if you have kids going back to school. And, yes, this is definitely an episode geared towards folks with kids. If you don't have kids, I suggest listening to Episode 326: How to Magic Question Your Morning. We're heading into a new season no matter who you are, so thinking about how to adjust your mornings to support what matters in that new season is a lovely way to spend your podcast listening time.

Alright, let's go through our Lazy Genius back-to-school checklist. Fun news! The checklist is available for you to print out! You can go to thelazygeniuscollective.com/checklist and get it emailed to you, so if you'd rather just listen rather than take notes, go for it. Then get the checklist after.

Now, why do we need one? Because there are many one-off tasks to take care of in this season, and they're easy to forget. Or we remember them too late. So today, I'm going to do some of the work for you. I've gathered some of the biggest tasks you likely have to prepare for going back to school, and by listing them all together and sharing some ways to Lazy Genius them, I think the next couple of weeks might not feel quite as scattered. Not completely calm because that is an unrealistic expectation, but a little less scattered.

Item one: doctor's appointments.

I'm putting this one at the top because it's likely the most time sensitive as everyone is trying to get their kids to the pediatrician or eye doctor or dentist before school starts. And if you have a kid who needs updated shots or needs a doctor to sign off on a physical for a student athlete, not to sound panicked, but time is running out. But it's not all the way out which is why it's on the checklist and first. If your kids need appointments and you have the ability to call the doctor right now, pause this episode and make the call. If you can't call right now, pause this episode and set a reminder in the best place you'll remember to make the call.

Item two: clothes.

This one might not be as urgent as it feels. Let's break it down. When I grew up, back to school clothes were a whole thing. The marketing efforts to get us to go to the mall and buy several full fledged cold weather outfits was enormous, and it must be done before school started. Well, depending on where you live, it might be 90 degrees for another two months. Nobody needs jeans right now. Plus, kids grow, so getting clothes now for a season that's later might end up being a slight waste of time. So here's your task. Think about your location and the likely weather as school begins. Can your kids survive on the clothes they currently have? If they can, score. Make a note in your calendar for when the weather is likely to start turning to go shopping. Put that task in its place later, and stop thinking about it now.

If your kids go to a school with uniforms, this is obviously a different story. You probably do need back to school clothes. So let's break down the decisions and tasks within this one small project. First, see what you have, and then name what you need. Second, make sure your kid has space in their room for new clothes. In our house, drawers are suddenly packed tight with clothes because we haven't cleaned out what no longer fits in awhile. So when you go to check for what you need, remember that this will happen. You will see overflow or clutter in your kids closets or dressers, and that's normal. Don't panic. Go in with a trashbag when you check for old school clothes so you can easily pull out what doesn't fit anymore and donate it or whatever you're going to do with it. Third, put a task or appointment on your calendar or whatever makes sense to either order clothes online or go to the store to get what you need. If your kid is picky about colors and styles, make sure you make that plan for a time they're free or they have at least a modicum of energy. Fourth, shop. Love it. Fifth, remember that you'll likely need to launder those new clothes before school starts. If you want to put that task on your calendar, go for it, but even if you don't, remember that you'll be adding some extra laundry to whatever your laundry rhythm is. And because you've already removed clothes that don't fit, you'll have a place to put them away. Look at that. Such a rockstar.

Item three: shoes.

This might be more urgent than clothes just because kids' feet grow fast, but also because a lot of folks do get new shoes at the start of school which means your kids' shoes could be a year old and look it. Soles are coming apart in the best way. So check your kids' shoes.

Some schools also don't allow open toed shoes, or kids have gym so they need shoes they can run in. With any necessary information, check what your kids have, get rid of what they don't need, and then make a plan to get what they do need. We're big fans in our house of getting the exact same shoe a kid loves in their next size. That makes it so we don't always have to go to the store which - let's be honest - is maybe one of the worst things of all time. A Rack Room in August is one of the most depressing places to be. You can feel the parental stress in the air. So that's a way we avoid that. We just up the size with the same shoe, and our kids pretty much wear the same pair of shoes until they fall apart. Not every lifestyle allows for that, but it does for us. Whatever way you do it, check on the shoes.

Item four: lunchbox and backpack check-in.

Do the kids need new of either of these? What often happens is you go to Target or Office Depot or whatever, a kid sees the display of new backpacks, and they want one. But you can't remember if they still have a good one back at home because it's under somebody's bed or full of Legos or something. So before you go shopping, check on the lunchbox and backpack situation. Do you need new? Does your kid want new, and can you accommodate that want? Backpacks can be expensive, so sometimes a kid has to use the same one another year if it's still in good shape. Making those calls before you go to the store is hugely helpful.

We're big fans of Planetbox lunchboxes. They're steel bento box style boxes, and Sam has had the same one since he was in preschool and the kid is about to start high school. I'm serious. We've gotten him a new carrying case for it maybe twice, but all three kids have these

lunchboxes and we love them so much. If your kid takes lunch and you don't mind the initial investment since these are a definitely pricier than a plastic zip-up, I cannot recommend them enough.

Item five: school supplies.

I don't know about you, but every single year, there are so many supplies we get from the supply list that the kids never use. But since I never kept track of those extra supplies and they were just floating in different drawers and baskets throughout the house, we just ended up getting new supplies every year. Two years ago, I wised up and gathered all of the unused school supplies around the house and put them in one big box. Now if a kid needs a folder or notebook in the middle of the year, I look in the box first. Often, we have what the kid needs.

So before you go shopping for school supplies at the store, shop your stash first. You might have more than you think. After you look at what you have and name what you need, make a plan of how and when you'll get the rest. Will you order online? Do you like going to the store with your kids and giving them their own list? Do whatever supports what matters to you. I personally love going school supply shopping because of how much I loved it as a kid, but I also do not like going to more than one store since the kids implode faster than I always think. Pro tip: take them after a meal, not before one. Hangry children in an office supply store is unbearable. We also have had great success going to Office Depot instead of anywhere else, simply because there is inevitably a weird supply that Target or Walmart doesn't have. Office Depot seems to have everything. This isn't an ad. This is our personal experience. Everyone is different, so you do you.

Also I'm sorry that school supplies are so expensive. I get sticker shock every single year. And also we're buying way more than we need year after year, so I'm hoping this year will be a lower cost since our personal stash is so big. But yeah, it's no joke.

Item six: paperwork.

After open house, there are all the forms. Your school might be different, you might have online forms, you might have little to do because it's just one kid. Lots of possibilities here. The point of this checkbox though is that there will almost certainly be paperwork, and we often forget it's coming. When the kids go to open house, I'm already a little stressed because I usually do it alone since Kaz is at open house at his own school. Three kids. Three classrooms. Three different social expectations. Three different levels of excitement or disappointment depending on how many friends are in the same class. There's lots to emotionally manage, and then each teacher (and it's even more in middle and high school!) gives you a handful of papers or Lord help us a QR code with information sheets, supply lists, classroom needs to shop for, medical forms, all kinds of things. This is your reminder that that is coming. So when you find out the dates and times of open house, put those in your calendar along with an hour block to fill out all the things. You don't have to do it that same night, but if you come home with all of those papers and no plan of when you're going to tend to them, the task will hang over your head and get bigger and bigger as time goes on. Plan for it now. Magic Question that puppy.

Item seven: meals around the start of school.

Your energy, schedule, timeline, all of it is different from mine and from everyone else listening to this episode, but we all have to do is eat. And likely feed. We have to feed the people multiple times a day, and when we're already a little stressed out by all the extra tasks, the feeding feels more overwhelming than it already is. So your task now is to the best of your ability meal plan around the start of school. You might do the week before and the week after or the first two weeks once school starts. It might even just be the first day or two of school, but I highly encourage you to choose as many meals as you're able now. Knowing that dinner is planned during such a busy, emotionally chaotic time will be a huge lifesaver.

Maybe you make the dinner the night before school starts super special, like at a family favorite restaurant or something. Then the first day of school, make something that makes everybody feel good. Use as many Brainless Crowdpleasers as you possibly can during that time to make life easier and more comforting to everyone. By taking 15 minutes to do that now, you're eliminating a ton of mental load later.

Item eight: bedtime routines.

There is legitimate panic when it's two days before school starts and your kids are still going to bed way later than they do during the school year or they've stopped taking showers as often or whatever happens in summer. As it should. But that transition can be tough when done quickly, so think now about what you need to help your kids adjust between now and the start of school. Think about what times need to shift, if you need a new order of operations for bedtime routines so that there's a little more structure, whatever you need. The point isn't necessarily what you do but that you start thinking about it earlier than when the panic happens. This isn't as relevant to every kid or every family, but it is for most and it's easy to forget.

For us, school starts Monday, August 26, so we'll start moving the kids toward bed earlier than usual the Monday before that. We'll take the week to ease into a slightly more structured evening rhythm, and it'll be fine. We'll also eat dinner a touch earlier that week since our summer dinner start time has been getting later and later. Which is fine because there's no rush to get ready for bed quickly. But soon there will be. Make a note wherever you will see the note to start adjusting evening and bedtime routines in whatever direction you need.

Item nine: kindness towards distraction.

This is less concrete than the other checkboxes, but it's just as necessary, if not more. This is the time of year when we're pulled in many directions. We're trying to be present in the summer, we're trying to prepare for the fall, we're tired and overstimulated, we're longing for routines again or maybe dreading them. There are so many things that happen when we go from one season to another, and the transition from summer to fall is a big one. It's easy to be distracted, to have anticipatory stress, to get snappy with our kids, to get frustrated with a partner because we're doing more to manage all of this than they are, to get in our own heads about how well or how terribly we're doing this whole parenting being a person thing. There's a lot to do, and there's a lot we think about.

Please kind to yourself in this season of distraction. It's a very normal place to be.

Item ten: seasonal ceremonies.

You're distracted. Your kids are probably feeling a lot of things. The energetic transition that happens at the end of summer before school starts looks different for everyone, but it's still there. A beautiful way to aid that transition is to have either a summer closing ceremony or a back to school opening ceremony. Or both! Spread them apart if you want. Close summer the week before school starts, use the week to get all the things ready and rest, and then open the start of school somehow.

If you're new here and you're like, what are you talking about, I love sharing this idea of opening and closing ceremonies. It was inspired years ago by the Olympics when I realized how valuable and meaningful marking the beginning and end of something was. Then I noticed that I already did that in a couple of ways in our own life. We mark the start of the fall holiday season with a day to our favorite corn maze and pumpkin patch, and it really marks the start of the season for us. Doing that kind of thing intentional is so good for our energy and memory making without being full of pressure. So if you're going from one season to another whether it's obvious like summer to fall or more personal like the end of a round of chemo or a home renovation or a season of working late... it doesn't matter what the seasonal change is. You get to decide what it is and how to mark it. The marking is the important thing.

So as you're moving through this next month and dealing with everyone's different energy and expectations, make a plan to either close the summer or open the school year. Do something simple or grand, playful or reflective, as a family or with friends. Whatever you want, but mark the change of the season. You'll be deeply glad you did.

To recap our back to school checklist: doctors appointments, clothes, shoes, lunchboxes and backpacks, school supplies, paperwork, meals around the time school starts, bedtime routines, kindness towards your distraction, and seasonal ceremonies. Paying attention to those ten things now will help you get ready to go back to school with more deep breaths, the tiniest bit more order, and hopefully enough ease to make the stress tolerable.

And that's the lazy genius back to school checklist.. Want to print it out? It's super simple, an appropriate level of cute, and has a couple of reminders on there to help you work through each task in a Lazy Genius way. You can get yours for free at thelazygeniuscollective.com/checklist.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Rebecca Beachy. Rebecca writes, "I love your principle of deciding once! Without realizing I had done it, years ago I decided once that our kids back to school routine would look like this: The night before the first day of school: 1) I print out some back-to-school questionnaires that I found on Pinterest that ask what grade they're going into, who the best friends are, what they want to be when they grow up, etc and have the kids fill them out (and save them from year to year). 2) I measure and mark them on our door frame ruler. And on the afternoon when they get home from the first day of school, I DECIDED ONCE years ago to always have the same snack waiting for them: dirt

pudding with gummy worms. This is the only time of the year I ever make this particular dessert so to them, it “tastes like going back to school!” (when my oldest went off to college, I couldn’t resist. I wrapped up a chocolate pudding Snack Pack, a pack of Oreos and a pack of gummy worms for him to unwrap on his first day of college. He texted me that he kind of loved that.”

Rebecca! This is precious. Decide Once coming in strong with this comment. I will say to those of you with kids in the middle of their school life, don’t feel like you can’t start a tradition in the middle. You can. You don’t even have to make it a tradition, something that’s repeated. You can just choose something for this year, do it, enjoy it, and move on. If your kid is in 6th grade and you’re lamenting not having done the questionnaires or something earlier than this, please don’t fret. Be here today, be kind where you are, and mark the moment however you’d like. Thanks for this idea, Rebecca, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

This episode is hosted by me, Kendra Adachi, and executive produced by Kendra Adachi, Jenna Fischer, and Angela Kinsey. The Lazy Genius Podcast is enthusiastically part of the Office Ladies Network. Special thanks to Leah Jarvis for weekly production.

Thanks, y’all, for listening, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don’t. I’m Kendra, and I’ll see you next week!