

ask the EXPERTS

Avoid the stress of morning conflict



● A loving hug before you say goodbye can help defuse a stressful morning

The morning rush can be stressful for parents and children alike as deadlines to leave for work, school, study and appointments puts pressure on everyone.

Recent research from the University of Queensland reveals that disagreement with children in the morning means parents are more likely to have a conflict at work and again later when they return home.

If this seems familiar to you then read on for some tips to help.

First of all work on reducing conflicts in the morning by preparing school clothes, bags and lunches the night before and agreeing with your children a routine and rewards for getting up on time. Rewards could include some TV after breakfast or an activity such as colouring which is easy to set up in advance. Get the routine going by giving regular reminders, for example, counting down the time before you must leave the house. You could say: "Tina, 15 minutes to go, start brushing your teeth now," or



By Claire Halsey — consultant psychologist working with First Steps Psychological Service in SureStart and the Children's Fund

"Joe, 10 minutes to go, please put your school bags by the door," and so on.

Manage any misbehaviour such as squabbling with brief consequences, for example, turning the TV off for one minute. This way you avoid having punishments hanging over children all day.

If you've had a difficult morning try to put aside strong emotions before saying goodbye to the children. It can be distressing for

both of you to drop them off while you're still cross with each other. A loving hug, kiss, pat or wave and kind words will leave all of you feeling better.

Once you're heading off to work, study or appointments take a deep breath and relax your shoulders and hands, let them go loose and consciously relax your face and jaw. To help you put aside the conflicts of the morning carry a photo of your child, a favourite showing a time when you were

cuddling up or having a laugh, and look at this to recall the love you have for your child. If you've kept an old card from them expressing their love for you this can be a nice reminder of positive feelings between the two of you.

Use any journey to work etc. as a chance to bring your thoughts to what's coming up next rather than going over the morning's issues. Make a mental note to take care in how you react to others to make sure you don't pass on your irritation from the morning's conflict to others around you. Remember each time you feel annoyance rising take a deep breath and recall a loving or happy moment to calm yourself.

For a free tip sheet on how to be more organised in the morning call First Steps Psychological Service on 01782 425683.

Parents' tip

Megan, mother of Alyce, aged eight, and Drew, aged 12, of Rode Heath, says: "Take some time to calm down before work, think about what has happened and put aside any negative feelings."

Dads the way to do it - get involved in education



● Education secretary Julie Kelly wants dads to get involved in children's education

Parents' attitudes concerning their own children's education are changing, says Education Secretary Julie Kelly. Parents include voluntary services for letters, websites, books, as well as reading, writing, computing and drama, while some parents are finding it difficult to find time to support their children's educational requirements to get involved in school life.

In recent years the importance of dads' involvement in schools was highlighted by the 2006 National Longitudinal Family Study — results include better attendance and exam results.

Julie Kelly, Secretary of State for Education, says: "The research shows engaged fathers and mothers spend 20 minutes longer time interacting with their children each day. This is encouraging news as it shows that dads' involvement is important to their children's success."

Further encouraging research suggests that fathers have a more positive impact on children's educational attainment than mothers. Kelly says: "It's important to target such as daily reading and homework, plus being with homework and at the school, to make the most of this news. Parents are encouraged to contact their schools to find out more about how to get involved."

Three ways to...

...stop your child wanting his thumb

1. Ignore it, avoid attention on thumb, as it helps child understand that you will get some rather than just reassurance.

2. Treat and reward your child when he doesn't suck his thumb, and use gentle reminders.

3. Systemic desensitisation is a good step to "thumb guard". Explain the reasons to your child, avoid using words "stupid", "right or wrong".

Something to smile about

NHS and private patients welcome.



The Family Dental Practice

88 King Street, Newcastle • 01782 520000
Appointments Mon-Fri 9am-5pm