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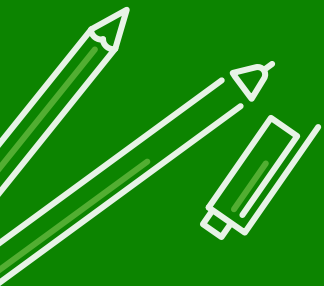
Fun ideas to help your family get back to school!

As the school holidays draw to a close, parents' focus will shift towards preparing their children for heading back to school. While this can be an exciting time, we know that for some children and families this can be a challenging time.

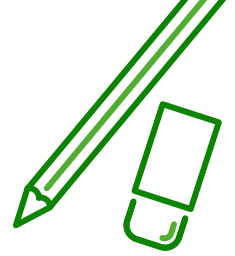
But did you know that your family dog could play a crucial role in helping everyone adjust to the new routine, while also helping ease stress and anxiety?

With this in mind, MORE THAN insurance and its charity partner, Dogs for Good, have teamed up to provide a Back to School guide. Packed full of fun tips and activities as well as practical advice to support your child - all through harnessing the power of your family's pet dog. While this guidance has been designed to support autistic children and their families, all tips, tricks and activities remain accessible for any family that may need them during this time of change.

You can also find top tips from MORE THAN's Veterinary Surgeon, Luke Mangion, on how to ensure your dog is well looked after and adjusted to this changing environment too.



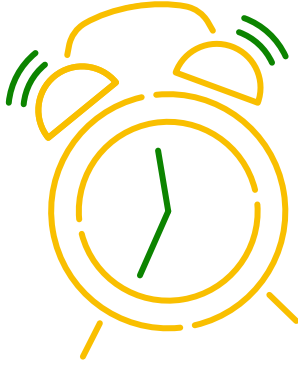
How your family's dog can help you adapt to the *back to school* routine



1

Getting your child out of bed in the morning

These activities can be used to help your child adjust to getting out of bed in the morning at a different time, with assistance from your dog.



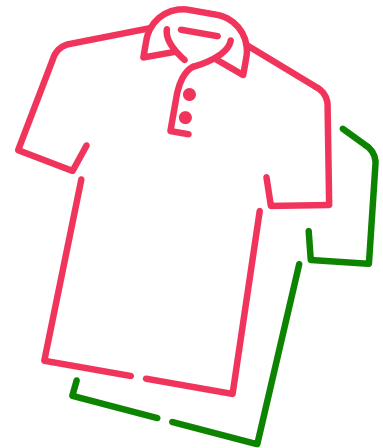
1. **Getting dressed for the day:** place a bandana on your dog to represent pyjamas and ask your child to help you remove the dog's 'pyjamas'. This will encourage them to mirror this activity themselves, helping them get dressed for the day.
2. **Going downstairs:** set an alarm clock for your dog and ask your child to come downstairs to help switch it off.
3. **Going to the toilet:** encourage your child to let the dog outside to go to the toilet (under supervision), this can prompt them to also think about going to the toilet themselves.

2

Putting on school uniform and getting dressed for the day

These activities can be used to support your child with choosing and putting on their uniform for school.

1. **Choosing clothing:** turn this into a game by letting your dog choose which item of uniform your child puts on first. Lay out their uniform and whichever item your dog places its paw on first is the 'chosen' piece of clothing your child puts on.
2. **Putting on clothing:** ask your child to choose which collar or bandana your dog will wear for the day, acting as a dog's uniform, and this should encourage your child to mirror this behaviour by putting on their uniform too. Don't forget, if your dog needs to go in a crate, ensure any collar or bandana is removed.



3

Eating breakfast in the morning

These activities can be used to help support your child in sitting down to eat and finish breakfast before the school day.



1. **Making breakfast:** encourage your child to help weigh out the dog's food before feeding it to them. Your child could also help choose which dog-safe fruit/food to put in the dog's bowl and add some to their own breakfast, if it's suitable for your child too. For dog-safe food and quantities, please see [here](#).
2. **Eating breakfast:** try to encourage your child to have breakfast at the same time as your dog. You can give your dog a food enrichment toy too if it helps.

Additional fun activity: Get a dog-shaped cookie cutter to make dog-shaped toast for your child.

4

Arriving home after school

This section involves activities aimed at regulating your child's emotions after a busy and stimulating day at school.



- 1. Talking about their day:** create a 'dog diary' describing what your dog did while your child was at school. This could mirror your child's school timetable, helping to ease any separation anxiety they may feel as a result of being away from their dog. Encourage your child to quietly read their dog's diary and talk to them about their day; this could help start conversations about your child's day and any struggles they experienced.
- 2. Discussing emotions:** a family dog walk can be a nice way to wind down. Walking side-by-side and talking to your dog whilst walking can make it easier for your child to talk about their day and any difficult emotions, while removing the pressure for them to open up to parents.
- 3. Decompressing:** when your child wants to decompress or relax after school, encourage rest time for both your dog and child. If your dog wants to play, provide activities for your dog to do, such as a licky mat for them to explore, calming them down.

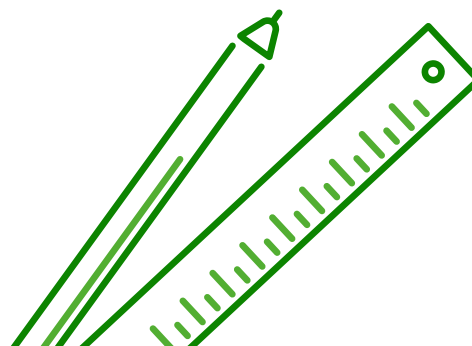
Additional guidance: walking with your dog can provide good opportunities to educate your child on topics such as the happiness they feel from being outdoors, as well as supporting their mental health and wellbeing.

5

Going to bed and winding down

This section is aimed at supporting your child in establishing a bedtime routine and winding down for the evening after a busy day at school.

- 1. Routine:** organise a 'doggy bedtime', where your child helps the dog get ready for bed by letting them out for the toilet and removing their collar, if applicable. They can also put a bandana on your dog, which they could call their 'pyjamas'. This can help encourage your child to follow the same night-time routine themselves. Don't forget to remove any collars or bandanas if they are in a crate overnight though!
- 2. Relaxing:** you could involve your dog in winding your child down for bedtime by reading something to both your dog and child, helping them relax and get cosy for the evening. Your dog could help choose a book, by placing treats on various options and encouraging your dog to pick one.
- 3. Bath time:** your dog can lie on the bathmat while your child is having a bath. To keep your dog occupied during bath time, you could put a licky mat on a tiled wall in the bathroom.



How to help your dog adjust to the *back to school* period: top tips from MORE THAN's vet, Luke Mangion

The bond shared with our dogs is unique and special. The longer we spend with our dogs, the deeper that bond becomes. During the school holidays, your dog will have become more familiar with having people around, playing more, going out for more walks, socialising and generally receiving more attention.

Luke Mangion, MORE THAN's Veterinary Surgeon, provides his top tips for this transition to help ensure your dog can calmly adjust to a new routine, once your child goes back to school and parents spend more time at work.



Top tips and advice

- 1. Trial school runs** – if you walk or drive to school, think about including your dog in the journey, and have a few trial runs in the build-up to going back to school. Make sure that the weather isn't too hot for your dog to be in the car or walking on a hot pavement. You should also check if your school allows this, and ensure you keep your dog away from other children and secure in the car, or on a lead with an adult.
- 2. Get your dog used to you not being home** – leave them alone for a few minutes and then gradually increase this time each day. Reward this with positive reinforcement.
- 3. Don't make a fuss about leaving or coming back home.** – Keep the mood calm so they are not establishing and connecting excitement to these moments, as this could increase the risk of them developing separation anxiety.
- 4. Establish a set playtime with your dog and child as the end of the holiday period draws near** – this could be in the afternoon (around the time school would end) or early evening. You could go for walks, play in the garden, play fetch, etc.
- 5. Set up playdates** – other families with pets may also be spending less time at home after the holidays, so setting up play dates during the day means that your dog can still socialise and have company during this time.
- 6. Look into a dog walker or doggy daycare if you are going to be away from home a lot** – another chance for your pet to have less time alone and more time socialising and playing.