

Mean Mom's Back to School Three R's

Ahh, the bugle cry of back to school. Does joy at the sound of the school bell make you feel like a mean mom? That alone should not do it. But that, along with a plan based on the three R's to take charge for a smooth transition, should. It takes a mean mom to get everyone back in the structured mode of the new school schedule.

Remember the three R's of being a student? Well, now that you're a mom of students, you have a whole new set of Three R's to live by:

1. Reality
2. Responsibility and
3. Routine

We all know that our reality is totally different from our kids' realities. So here lies the first challenge. Mean Mom's Club: The Mean Mom's Rule Book¹ includes the rule *There's a difference between need and want...and I'll tell you which it is*. This rule is critical in following the first of the Three R's. When your son says he needs that t-shirt that hangs down to his knees and has the manufacturer's logo splashed across the front, all for a measly \$45, somebody has to bring this dude back to reality: mean mom reality! His reality is of course that of strutting down the hall looking cool. Your reality is that you have \$150 for his total back to school wardrobe including shoes, socks, and underwear. The t-shirt is not happening.

My 11 year old son once stood in the store aisle in tears because I refused to buy that t-shirt. I told him to let me know when he was finished so we could get on with our errands. He lived without the cool t-shirt and was not ostracized from his friends, much to his dismay. If we all refused to buy into this nonsense, the kids would be dressed in basic, inexpensive clothes and the competition would go away. We're in charge, mean moms!

As a mom, it is your primary goal to teach your kids to become responsible so that when they grow up they can take care of themselves and will move out. A good mean mom does not have 22 year old children living at home. By that age they are adults on their own and that bedroom is your party or yoga room! Back to school is a perfect time to work on responsibility skills. The rule *You'll always be my baby...no matter how old you are* will help to set up a realistic plan for responsible behavior at different ages. Kids progress through specific developmental stages, each with its own milestones regarding how they think, how they see the world, and what they can manage.

The responsibility R must be done with both developmental stages and your family values in mind. What rules are important in your house? Do beds need to be made in the morning? Do kids need to get themselves up and fed on their own? They might be able to do some or all of this depending on their development.

The other critical consideration in this part of your plan is enforcement. The rule *I brought you into this world...and I can take you out* talks about the difference between punishment and teaching and when each might be most effective. This part of the plan absolutely must be set up and communicated from the beginning, not thrown in helter-skelter as rules are broken.

That point leads to the last of the Three R's, routine. Kids feel safe when they have a routine they can count on. They feel safe and loved when the rules are always the same and always enforced. The job of a good mean mom is to be on top of those rules every day and enforce them consistently no matter what.

This R is sometimes the hardest to stay on top of. Two rules will help. *I'm going to be the perfect mom...yeah right* emphasizes the need to have and use a support network. Being a mom is the toughest job out there and it never ends. *I get to be President of the mean moms club* gives you the strength to stay on top of the plan even in the face of tantrums and tears and "I hate you!"

It's up to us as good mean moms to help kids understand what they need vs. what they want, learn to take responsibility for the things they can do, and to create and reinforce a routine they can count on as they transition from the freedom of summer to the structure of the new school year. Back to school can be a smooth transition for kids and parents if you just follow the Three R's: Reality, Responsibility, and Routine.

ⁱ The author, Maureen LoBue, M.Ed., has combined both personal and professional experience to create *Mean Mom's Club: The Mom's Rule Book*. The purpose is to provide a common sense foundation for parents to take charge of any given situation by using the rules to plan ahead. The 7 rules prepare parents to deal with situations at different ages for different children, using their own parenting style.

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