A new school year is full of exciting opportunities, but it can also be stressful for parents and students. These tips may help manage the challenges of transitioning to “school” mode:

► **Manage anxiety.** If your child is anxious about the upcoming school year, ask why. Whether your child is going to a different school, has a teacher with a scary reputation, or is sad because a friend moved away over the summer, let them talk openly about their concerns. Take practical steps to allay fears, such as arranging a tour of the school before their start date.

► **Map out a typical school day.** What time will your child have to be up and how does that affect your wake-up time? How long will it take to drive your child to school or for them to walk to the bus stop? Do a few test runs before the school year starts. Also, determine what tasks can be done in the evening (such as packing lunches) so the morning isn’t so rushed.

► **Shop smart.** Take an inventory of last year’s leftover school supplies and your child’s current wardrobe. What new items will be needed? Can you buy a few items each week to minimize the impact on your budget? Watch for sales or visit thrift stores or yard sales.

► **Access resources.** Many schools offer programs that may be helpful to students and parents. Consider what options may help with cutting expenses or managing schedules.

► **Create backup plans.** Put a plan in place for the following situations:
  - A schedule conflict that makes it difficult for you to drop off or pick up your child
  - Your child is unable to go to school due to illness or inclement weather
  - The school’s holiday and in-service schedules

LifeMatters offers resources that can help you more easily manage the upcoming school year. Call today!

**Inside:**
- Coping with Disappointment
- Become More Energy Efficient
- Retirement Budget Planning

Source: Life Advantages, LLC
Coping with Disappointment

When plans go awry or you hear bad news, does it ruin your day? While everyone needs time to regroup or rebuild resilience, some people struggle more than others to recover.

Reframing negatives into positives is one way to regroup more quickly and move forward. The next time you are recovering from a mistake or feeling disappointed, try these tips:

- **Take control.** When plans fall through, shift your focus to developing a backup plan. For instance, if a cookout is cancelled because of bad weather, focus on other ways you might enjoy the day with family or friends. An indoor cookout combined with a movie or game night could be just as fun.

- **Be proactive.** Thinking through possible outcomes will help you prepare for those you find disappointing. It may also help you determine what’s next if the results are not what you hoped they would be.

- **Avoid self-fulfilling prophecies.** If you expect to fail when you start a project, you are more likely to believe that your efforts have ended in failure. Approaching a problem with a “what do I have to lose?” attitude may put the outcome in a more positive light. Remember, we learn best from experience.

- **Manage negative emotions.** Anger, fear, and other negative emotions are not unusual after a disappointment. Dwelling on these feelings is stressful and may worsen conditions such as depression or high blood pressure. While it’s important to acknowledge your emotions, look for healthy ways to address them.

- **Take a positive approach.** If you often project negativity or unhappiness, it may affect how others react to you. Maintaining a positive mindset may improve your communication with others and could lead to more effective problem-solving.

- **Smile.** The physical process of smiling releases “feel good” chemicals. Laughter is another way to reset your mood.

- **Maintain a routine.** A routine is soothing and may help build resilience. Exercise, eat healthy meals, get enough sleep, and connect with supportive people in your life.

For more suggestions on how to cope with disappointment, contact LifeMatters. Help is available 24/7/365.

Source: The StayWell Company, LLC
Dollars & Sense: Become More Energy Efficient

There are plenty of ways to bring down your energy costs, whether you own or rent your home. While some of these tips are specific to the summer season, many of them may be helpful year-round.

► If you own your home, consider installing solar panels and upgrading your thermostat or HVAC system. If you rent, set your thermostat lower in winter and higher in summer.

► Switch to energy saving LED light bulbs. Not only do they cut back on energy usage, but they last much longer than traditional incandescent bulbs. Also, make it a habit to turn off the lights when you leave a room.

► Wash most loads of clothes on the “cold” or “tap cold” setting. Hold off on running a load until the washing machine is full. When replacing a unit, look for energy-saving features that will decrease water consumption.

► Unplug small electronics that are rarely used or only used for a few minutes a day. Electronic devices draw energy even when they’re not on, so unplugging your toaster or coffee maker will shave a surprising amount off your electric bill.

► Set your water heater (or ask for it to be set) to a moderate temperature. Water that is hotter than needed not only wastes energy, but is a safety risk as well.

► Dishwashers use far less water than washing by hand, so if you have one, use it. Fill as close to capacity as possible before running a load.

► Fix water leaks. Even a slow drip will increase your water usage. If you rent and are unable to repair a water leak quickly, keep a plastic carton beneath the drip. Use the water that drips into the carton to water plants.

► Installing new windows may save thousands over time. If you can’t afford new windows, consider replacing old caulk or weather-stripping. Window kits, solar shades, or blackout curtains may help renters minimize energy loss due to windows.

► If you rent or live in a condominium, suggest energy-saving improvements. Adopting even one or two could benefit everyone who lives in your building.

For more suggestions on how to make your home more energy efficient, contact LifeMatters. We’re here to help!
Retirement Budget Planning

While it’s never too early to start saving for retirement, people who are nearing retirement age have extra considerations to keep in mind. These include:

- Where will I live?
- What will I do with my time?
- What level of income will I need to sustain my lifestyle?
- If I want to get by on less money, what spending cuts will I need to make?

Reviewing these questions may help you create a retirement budget that works for you. Here are some other tips to keep in mind:

- **Forget the 80% spending rule.** This bit of common wisdom says that you should plan to live on 80% of your pre-retirement monthly income. However, many factors could affect what you will need to make ends meet, such as inflation, travel, where you live, and whether you co-habitate with family or downsize your home.

- **Confirm your estimated income.** Sources include Social Security payments, pensions, and retirement savings accounts. If you work with a financial advisor, they can estimate how much monthly income you can expect to have available throughout a reasonable anticipated lifespan.

- **Consider work options.** If you plan to work part-time, think about what kind of job you want to have. Will you continue in your current field or would you prefer a change of pace? Could you convert a hobby into a source of income? While freelancing or working on special projects may be a good way to practice your trade, it may result in less predictable income.

- **Review your current budget.** Identify expenses that will no longer be necessary once you retire and those that can be cut to reduce spending. Model budgets based on life changes you might make, such as moving to a different place or traveling more.

- **Do a trial run.** Reduce spending based on your estimated retirement budget for a month or two. What works and what doesn’t? If you’re struggling to make ends meet, you may need to revise your estimates or adjust your plans.

LifeMatters financial consultants can help you develop a budget that works for you — no matter what your age! Call 24/7/365.

Source: Balance