



The Mottley Law Firm

8001 Franklin Farms Drive, Suite 125
Richmond, Virginia 23229

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BACK-TO-SCHOOL MADE SIMPLE

Smart Organization Tips for Busy Parents

Why is it that the first day of school always sneaks up on you? One minute, summer feels endless, and the next, you are juggling supply lists, new routines, and busy schedules. For many parents, the shift can feel overwhelming. However, with a little planning and a few smart systems, back-to-school season can feel far more manageable.

Begin with simple systems.

Organization begins before the first bell rings. Taking time to sort through clothes, supplies, and old materials can prevent clutter from piling up later. Experts recommend decluttering drawers and checking what you already have before shopping to avoid unnecessary purchases.

Creating designated spaces in your home also makes a significant difference. A small "drop zone" near the door for backpacks, shoes, and papers helps keep everything in one place. Even a homework station or supply bin can reduce daily chaos and keep kids focused.

Build routines that stick.

Consistency is the backbone of a smooth school year. Start easing into school routines a week or two early by adjusting bedtimes and morning habits. This helps children transition from relaxed summer schedules to structured school days without stress.

Evening preparation also makes a major difference. Laying out clothes, packing backpacks, and prepping lunches the night before can transform hectic mornings into calm, predictable starts. These small habits add up quickly and create a sense of stability for the entire family.

Use visual organization tools.

Children thrive when they can see what is expected of them. Visual schedules, color-coded calendars, or categorized charts can guide kids through their day without constant reminders. These tools are especially helpful for younger children who benefit from clear, easy-to-follow cues.



A central family calendar can also keep everyone on the same page. Between school events, extracurriculars, and family commitments, having one place to track everything reduces confusion and last-minute stress.

Keep it realistic.

It's easy to overcommit at the start of a new school year. Many parents feel pressure to sign their children up for multiple activities, but too many commitments can quickly lead to burnout. Choosing fewer activities and focusing on what truly matters helps maintain balance and keeps schedules manageable.



THE MOTTLEY CREW REVIEW

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SMALL MOMENTS, BIG BLESSINGS

Where Happiness Happens Most

Today is the best day of your life.

Now, that may seem like a grandiose or presumptuous statement (especially if your day already feels far from the best), but please hear me out. In case you were unaware, August is Happiness Happens Month, a designation created by the Secret Society of Happy People (an organization that indeed exists) to remind us all that "happiness happens" anywhere, especially in our lives' smallest moments.

What does it mean to be happy? I suspect many of us ask ourselves that question from time to time. I sure have. For many people, the idea of achieving true happiness is attached to a destination ("I'll be happy when I can finally take that vacation") or some concept of "success" ("I'll be happy once I earn more money and get a bigger house"). It's always something people work toward arriving at later.

Well, you know what else happens later? Death. Most of us don't know how much time we may have left, so putting off happiness for a future time should never be the goal.



Although I tend to be an optimistic and "happy" person who loves interacting with people, I certainly do have dark or grumpy times when I'm soured by the world around me. I suppose that's just a normal part of life, but I try my best not to stay in that mindset for too long. In the last 10 years or so, I've gotten better at being more present in the moment and embracing what life is giving me at that time. Sometimes, it's as simple as going for a walk, spending quality time in nature, taking a pleasant drive, or just taking a moment to enjoy the fact that I'm alive.

What drives me most in this positive direction? To be honest, it has a lot to do with my work as an attorney. Sadly, my profession has remarkably high rates of depression and anxiety. More than a few of my peers have had difficulty balancing the sometimes harsh realities of the cases they handle with their desire to live a happy and fulfilling life outside the office. No matter how you earn a living, finding the ideal work/life balance is essential. Otherwise, we fall into the all-too-common trap of living to work rather than working to live.

Now, back to today being the best day of your life. One day, during a meeting of an attorney group I participate in, it was suggested that we each keep a "Five Minute Journal" each morning in which we write down positive thoughts on paper. Every day, I write down, "Today is the best day of my life."

It's worth a try. You may be about to have the most stressful or suckiest day of your life, but if you start out by saying, "Hey, today's actually going to be the best day of my life," it forces you to think that even though today's going to be rough with plenty of unknowns along the way, you're still alive.

And that's something to be happy about.

This month, please take some extra time to prioritize self-care and your physical and mental health. Even if you don't start a "Five Minute Journal" of your own, there are plenty of ways to travel on the road to true happiness. I wish you great peace and joy on that journey.

—Kevin Mottley

Midlife Stress Isn't in Your Head *It's in Your Nervous System*

Midlife can feel like your body suddenly changed the rules. You might find yourself lying awake at night, tired but alert, or reacting more strongly to stress than you used to. This experience is incredibly frustrating, but common. It's your nervous system adjusting to a new internal landscape shaped by hormones, stress, and life demands.

Why Your Nervous System Feels Different Now

In your midlife years, your body undergoes significant hormonal shifts, particularly involving estrogen and progesterone. These hormones play a direct role in how calm or reactive your nervous system feels. As they fluctuate, the system that once handled stress smoothly can become more sensitive.

At the same time, life often becomes more demanding. Career pressure, family responsibilities, and disrupted sleep all add to the load, which can reduce your stress “buffer,” making everyday challenges feel heavier than before.

The result is a nervous system that spends more time in a heightened state, often called the fight-or-flight response. When this happens, cortisol stays elevated, which can disrupt sleep, mood, and overall energy.

The ‘Wired but Tired’ Experience

Many people describe midlife as a time of feeling exhausted and overstimulated at the same time. This happens when the calming branch of the nervous system struggles to keep up with the stress response.

You might notice racing thoughts at night, increased anxiety, or a sense that your body cannot fully relax. This is not a failure of resilience. It is a biological shift in how your system processes stress.

Simple Ways to Calm Your System

Calming your nervous system does not require a complete life overhaul. Small, consistent habits can make a meaningful difference.

Begin with sleep. Prioritizing rest helps regulate cortisol and supports recovery. Gentle movement, like walking or stretching, can also signal safety to the body. Time outdoors and reduced screen exposure give your system space to reset.

Breathing practices and mindfulness are especially effective. Slow, steady breaths activate the parasympathetic system, which helps your body shift out of stress mode, and over time, this builds resilience rather than just temporary relief.

A New Way Forward

Midlife is a recalibration, not a breakdown. Your nervous system is asking for a different rhythm, one that balances effort with recovery. When you begin intentionally supporting your system, you may notice something surprising. Calm becomes easier to access, energy feels steadier, and your body starts working with you rather than against you.



Broker Blunders

THE HIDDEN LINK IN TRUCK ACCIDENT CASES

Few cases are as complex as those involving trucks.

When a client contacts me regarding a potential case following a truck accident, one of the first things I do is review the transportation cycle surrounding the incident. In layman’s terms, the “transportation cycle” is a term used to describe the system in place for moving goods from one place to another in this country.

The cycle’s structure is straightforward: The shipper is the individual or entity that wants something moved, and the motor carrier is the trucking company responsible for moving it. A third entity, the freight broker, essentially serves as a matchmaker between the shipper and the motor carrier.

When a truck-related collision results in serious injuries to a client, determining who is responsible for the injury and how much insurance they have is a large part of my job. That’s where freight brokers and the concept of “negligent hiring” come into play. Unfortunately, not all freight brokers are as good at matchmaking as they could be, leading to the hiring of trucking companies with spotty driving records and other issues. If a broker is aware of a trucking company’s poor driving and safety histories at the time of hiring, that broker can be found legally responsible for any injuries the trucking company’s negligence causes to another party.

I was inspired to inform my readers about how freight brokers can impact a truck accident case after learning of a recent Supreme Court decision that reiterated that middlemen in the transportation cycle can be held liable under state law for negligent hiring practices. It serves as a reminder that we often have more options than the obvious ones when determining liability and seeking justice for an injured client.

As always, I’m available and happy to answer any questions you may have about freight broker liability and other issues involving truck-related personal injury cases.

—Kevin Mottley

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SUDOKU



AIR FRYER CHICKEN FLAUTAS

INGREDIENTS

- 12 oz cooked chicken breast, rotisserie or plain, shredded
 - 1/2 lime, juiced
 - 1 large garlic clove, minced
 - 1 tsp ground cumin
 - 1 4-oz can mild diced green chilies, drained
 - 1 cup pepper jack cheese, shredded
 - 12 6-inch flour tortillas
 - Olive oil spray
- Toppings**
Pico de gallo, sour cream, shredded lettuce, cilantro, etc.

DIRECTIONS

- Spray air fryer basket with olive oil.
- In large bowl, combine chicken, lime juice, garlic, cumin, and chilies and mix well. Add cheese.
- Place one tortilla on clean work surface.
- Add 1/3 heaping cup of filling onto bottom third of tortilla.
- Roll tortilla up from the bottom to surround filling and place in air fryer basket, seam side down.
- Repeat with remaining filling and tortillas, arranging flautas in air fryer basket in a single layer.
- Spray tops with olive oil and cook at 400 F until the flautas are golden brown, 8–9 minutes, flipping halfway through.
- To serve, place 2 flautas on plate and add toppings.

No air fryer? Bake flautas on a parchment-lined sheet pan at 400 F for 15 minutes.

A CITATION FOR A CRASH



Can You Still Seek Compensation?

I get a lot of questions here at the firm, but this one is among the most common:

“If I’m ticketed by a police officer after a car accident, can I still have a claim for personal injuries if I was injured?”

The answer is ... *maybe*.

I recently had a potential client call me after she was involved in a pretty serious crash with a tractor-trailer on Interstate 95. It seemed the potential client got the worst of it, as far as damage and injuries were concerned, but her ability to seek recovery for her losses was unclear at best.

The Virginia State Trooper had cited her for an improper lane change, thereby causing the accident. I explained to her that unless she got the traffic citation dismissed by the Commonwealth or by the judge, her chances of having a personal injury case worth pursuing were pretty small, and I would not take the case.

The reason for my stance was simple. In Virginia, we have something called **contributory negligence**. We’re only one of a handful of jurisdictions in the country that follow this rule, which states that if you, as the injured person, are in any way responsible for causing the incident that injured you and were negligent, you are **completely barred from recovery**. It’s a pretty harsh rule, in my opinion, but it’s still the law.

When a potential client contacts me after being clearly injured but also receiving a citation, I will turn down the case unless they’re able to get out of that citation. Another practical problem is that the other driver’s insurance company will refuse to resolve a case with someone who has received a citation.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about contributory negligence or would like to discuss the specifics of your case.

—Kevin Mottley