

organize today!

Ideas and tips to help you live
an organized, simpler life at work and home

Getting Kids Organized

It's a great time to teach a child to get organized! This month, set aside time to teach organizing skills to your kids. Or, if you're a little rusty yourself, make a goal to learn together as a family.

Whether you're a parent, grandparent, friend, or neighbor, the skills you share will remain with kids for a lifetime. This newsletter will provide some tips that can be used with your favorite kids of all ages.

You'll learn how to get kids organized for school, as well as how to tackle that ever-growing pile of art projects. Establishing routines for organizing will make life and its unexpected challenges a snap!

Easy as 1-2-3

Clutter control for kids of all ages

Managing the mess that kids make can be overwhelming sometimes. But by adding some simple routines and expectations, your household will function like clockwork!

Make organizing a part of each day. Let kids know that they need to be responsible for their own possessions. Teach children how to pick up after themselves. It's important to show kids that every item they own has a "home" where it needs to return when they're done using it. Be consistent.

Establish simple routines that are age-specific. Younger children will need more direction and simpler expectations than pre-teens and teenagers. For example, saying "Clean up your room" is overwhelming to a kindergartner. Instead, try "Please put the Legos in the shoebox and your books on the bookshelf." Some tasks that children under five can do:

- put dirty laundry in the hamper
- clean up toys (with assistance) at the end of the day



Kids over five should also be able to:

- make their beds every day
- clean up toys throughout the day
- select their clothing for the next day
- take schoolwork out of their book bags each day

As they grow, add more responsibilities. You are giving them skills and confidence to tackle more challenging projects in the coming years. And, most important, praise your children frequently for their efforts.

Artwork overload



Wondering what to do with the wonderful compilation of kids' art? Caregivers should learn that they don't have to save every single project made by a child. Here are a few great ideas to keep the memories but save some space.

- Post artwork temporarily to give the family a chance to admire. To create a fancy-looking refrigerator display, purchase a few 8x10 and 5x7 cardboard mattes. Glue a plastic sleeve behind it to hold kids' pictures, and attach magnets so it sticks to the fridge. You can easily remove and rotate art as new creations arrive.
- As items are rotated out, store them in a drawer, tote, or even an unused pizza box. At year's end, help kids select their top ten favorites to save. Then, take photos or videotape of three-dimensional art and toss the rest.
- Start an Art of the Month Club. Have kids select one piece of artwork each month to give to family and friends. (Grandparents love this idea!)
- As new artwork enters your home, ask yourself: "Is this different than other works we've already saved?" "Does it give me a glimpse into my child's uniqueness?" "Does it make me laugh or cry?" Keep only those that really make an impact. Let the rest go so you can appreciate the best.

Getting kids organized for school

"Getting organized" is more than eliminating clutter and creating neat storage systems. One of the most important areas of organizing is task management. It's never too early (or too late) to teach kids how to get and stay organized with schoolwork. The skills they learn now will carry over into high school, college, and ultimately, their careers and home management as adults.

Establish a great homework routine. With your child, determine the best time for daily school work and stick with it. For some kids, it will be right after school. Others may need some downtime to play, and then it's time to hit the books. The most important thing is to stick to the schedule so your child knows what's expected.

Set up the space. Have a designated study area, such as the kitchen table. But for unique assignments, allow for some flexibility such as moving to a rocking chair for reading chapter books. Create a school supply box and keep it well stocked with supplies (paper, pens, pencils, crayons, scissors, glue, ruler, sticky notes, calculator, etc.) so kids don't have an excuse to get up.

Make sure you know what's going on. Instruct children to unload their backpacks as soon as they come home. Have them hang up their bags in a designated area (try a coat rack, pegs on the wall, or a wicker laundry basket near the front door) for easy access tomorrow and bring homework to the designated study area. Check in each day so you're aware of their workload and take special care when they seem overwhelmed.

Encourage the use of lists and planners. The older kids get, the more homework and activities they'll have. Teach them to manage their tasks with the use of simple lists or a planner/calendar of some sort. Office supply stores sell ones with cute kid-friendly designs, or use computer lists (or even PDAs) for techie kids. When they learn of upcoming assignments, tests, or events, they should write them down in their planners.

Encourage color coding. Color affects our mood and memory. Let kids pick the colors of their folders and notebooks to correspond to different classes. If green reminds them of science, then they'll know instantly to grab the green notebook when looking for their science notes.

Ask the organizer — real solutions for real families

We simply have too much stuff! Kids' toys, clothes, and collectibles are overtaking our home. How can we start downsizing?

Often, the sheer volume of “stuff” in a kid’s life — toys, sporting equipment, books, collections, clothes — is overwhelming. Help kids downsize every six months by donating seldom-used toys and outgrown clothing. Or, rotate toys every few months. Let Barbie go on a “cruise” to the attic for a few months. Oh, the adventures she’ll share when she returns!

Always keep a donation box easily accessible in one of your closets. Regularly toss in clothes that are too small or toys that are underappreciated. A great time to purge is before a birthday or gift-giving holiday. Establish a “new toy in, old toy out” system. Talk to them about how it feels — and how important it is — to donate to local charities. Consider a local preschool or church nursery for toys and homeless shelters for clothing donations.

A good rule of thumb is to have the drawers, shelves, and closets of your home just half full. That leaves room for clothes to breathe and toys to be seen. Remember, you are not required to fill all the space you have!

We can never find anything in our home. We know it's there, but we just don't have a system for storage. Ideas?

The key is to sort, containerize, and assign a “home” for every item you own. Teach kids to group similar things together, then find appropriate-sized containers that hold them. For example, a tackle box works well for art supplies. Clear plastic boxes with lids (shoebox size is great) work well for things like Legos, doll clothes, action figures, video games, and more. The one item that usually doesn’t work well for organizing is a big toy chest. Small items disappear into the bottom and it just turns into a big mess.

With colorful markers, write the name of what’s inside each container. This makes it easy for retrieval, and, even more important, for clean-up! For kids who can’t yet read, glue photos or drawings of the objects on the front of the containers. Then, decide where each group of items will “live.” Select a spot that’s handy and close to where you use it. Make it the norm to return items to their homes at the end of every day.

By day's end, I feel overwhelmed by the mess in our home. It looks like a tornado hit! But I can't handle this all on my own. How do I get my kids to pitch in?

Establish the “ten-minute pick-up.” Every evening before bedtime, set your timer for ten minutes. Put on some fast-paced music. Then *everyone* cleans up as fast as they can. Use laundry baskets to stash items for each room. Then assign each person a basket to deliver to the correct room. If kids are consistently leaving their belongings everywhere, establish a “penalty box” for out-of-place items. Kids must do an extra chore to reclaim the item or lose it forever. Sounds harsh, but if they really loved it, they’d take care of it, right? Remind them that we all have to be responsible for our own possessions.

How can I manage all the paperwork related to my kids' activities, appointments, and school?

Even if you have a well-functioning file cabinet in your home, you still need a mini, portable filing system for your frequently accessed papers. In the kitchen, keep an accordion file divided into sections. Include sections for school, sports, after-school activities, current medical information, and anything else with which you’re currently active. Include school schedules, lunch menus, health forms, and more. Remember, papers should be stored vertically, not horizontally in stacks on your counter!

Staying organized and sane in the car, train, or plane

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- **Time occupiers:** Pack some inexpensive and simple things to keep kids busy. Kids can have fun drawing pictures on Post-it Notes and sticking them on the side windows or seats. Binoculars will occupy their eyes. Audio tapes or CDs will occupy their ears. Crossword puzzles, books, magazines, and handheld video games will pass the time. Little kids enjoy a cookie sheet and magnets. Pack it all up in a box that fits between the car's back seats — an instant kid divider. Or stash it in a neat tote for plane travel.
- **Snacks:** Bring some special treats that kids don't usually get

at home. Little bags of homemade trail mix, granola bars, yogurt in a tube, animal crackers, juice boxes, mini bagels, and tortilla roll-up sandwiches are all great.

- **Clean-up supplies:** Baby wipes will save the day. Pack a bunch! Or try a wet washcloth in a plastic zipper bag. Also, keep a change of clothing easily accessible for every member of the family in case of weather changes or spills.
- **Take a break:** If traveling by car, take a break every two hours. Find a rest stop and let

kids jump rope, blow bubbles, or toss a frisbee. If traveling by plane or train, let kids stretch their legs in the aisles.



- **Keep important documents close by:** Take an expandable coupon organizer and fill it with the necessary paperwork: hotel confirmations, plane tickets, maps, phone cards, and more.