

Teach children organizing skills for a lifetime



Having only one child, I'm hardly an expert on getting children out the door for school. But being organized was my forte so a lot of planning went into smooth mornings and calm evenings so we could get the most out of our time. Here are some ideas from my clients and myself to establish routines with your children to stay organized as they start the new school year. Let's break it down by source of frustration:

Out the door in the morning:

- Think quick and healthy: Protein bars, glass of 2% chocolate milk, hard-boiled egg, mini Triscuits or Frosted Mini-Wheats, cubed fruit.
- Have book bags by the exit door with homework and papers signed inside.
- Sports and music instrument bags for after school activities should be packed and ready to go the night before.

After school:

- Select one drawer for after-school snacks for easy access or place a list on the fridge.
- Designate a place to do homework: the younger the student, the closer to the parents. Clear desks of clutter and set up with a few necessary school supplies.
- Make sure there is good lighting wherever homework is done: by the bed, over the desk, or in the kitchen. Overhead lights are not always enough.

Laundry, laundry, laundry:

- Ideally, laundry will be done during the weekend so everyone can put away their own before the week begins.
- Lay out clothing for the week for small children. Use a hanging closet sweater holder to organize clothing for the week or use five hooks for each day of the week.
- If your laundry room (or a nearby closet) is big and is on the main floor, consider keeping younger children's clothing in that area to save time in the morning and to put clothing away.

- Place a box in your child's room to place clothing they no longer want instead of putting it in the laundry.

Tackle messy rooms:

- Each child should have a BIG trash can and BIG hamper.
- Use open shelving, open toy bins, and hooks on the walls for easy clean up; clothing hangers and dresser drawers can be difficult for young children.
- Make sure drawers aren't overstuffed and can open and close easily.
- When you buy a new toy or piece of clothing, donate an old one. Take out of your home as much as you bring in.

Chores around the house:

- Keep chores simple: five for each child. Keep a chart on the refrigerator to keep track: e.g. laundry away, setting the table, loading the dishwasher, cleaning up their room, taking out recycling, etc.
- Children crave structure and accountability (no, I'm not kidding) and a chore chart keeps them accountable to the family. It also provides a vehicle for rewards and allowance.

Crazy schedules:

- On Sunday night, mark the family calendar with all activities for the week. Keep the calendar in a central location. Make it portable if possible and take with you to appointments.
- I used a weekly day planner since it had more room to write entries. I kept it open by the phone for all to see and use.
- Don't overschedule your children (or yourself!). The more activities you put into the mix, the less organized you'll feel on a daily basis. Better for you, better for the kids.

It's not always easy but organizing your home to establish habits for your children is building skills for a lifetime.

Clutter Quote: *"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."* Aristotle

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