

7 Easy Steps to a Well-Organized Family

It's 7:15, your son is looking for his backpack, your daughter is crying because she doesn't know what to wear, you've still got to make their lunches and you need to be out the door in ten minutes. Don't you wish mornings were more organized?

If you spend a little effort up front, the benefits of organization can provide more time for you and your family and less time looking for things and rushing to get somewhere. We've compiled a list of 7 organizational tips to help get you started.

1 De-clutter We naturally are less stressed when our surroundings are de-cluttered and organized. Ask each family member to spend 45 minutes (some may require a whole day!) cleaning out his closet and dresser, placing out-of-date and outgrown items in a bag for donation or consignment. Remember, **it's not de-cluttering if the items stay in your house.** Take the bags to a local charity and check around for consignment sales.

Clean out the pantry and fridge in preparation for storage containers. Prepare some grab-and-go snacks such as individual fruit containers, nuts and granola bars. Keep these around for lunches and after-school snacks.

2 Take an hour on the Weekend to plan the week. Make menus, grocery lists and calendars. Ask your kids what they have planned for the week, sign school papers and add all of this to the bulletin board. (see # 4-Command Central)



Plan complete outfits from socks to accessories and place in gallon-size plastic bags or a hanging canvas organizer. Label them with days of the week.

3 Thirty Minute Round-Up Not many of us are at our best in the mornings, so why overload ourselves with decisions and tasks that can be done the **night before**? Making some preparations in advance creates a less demanding morning, and, if everyone pitches in, should not take long. Prepare lunches the night before. While you're at it, set out breakfast items. Pack backpacks with homework, money, extra-curricular supplies and set by the back door, or better yet, put in the car. More items you put in the car the night before equals less chaos the morning of. Don't forget that preschoolers and teenagers alike can do most or all of these tasks.

Teaching kids early how to do these things eventually takes the responsibility off you, leaving more time for other things. Plus it gives them a sense of accomplishment.

4 Command Central One of the most basic and useful items of any organized family is a command center. This is the area where all communications are posted, calendars are updated, and keys, phones, sunglasses and jackets are kept. This can be a simple bulletin board with hooks or individual folders hung on the wall. Keep the center in a public place near the back door. Family schedules, announcements, memos and messages should be kept and updated here. You may want to have a calendar for each member in addition to the family calendar. Assign each member a different color for quick reference.

5 Make time for you in the morning Get up 15 or 30 minutes before the family and check mail, make a to-do list, read or exercise. Go ahead and get ready so you can focus on your children. The extra time will help improve your attitude-setting the tone for the morning.

6 Create Homework Stations Decide on the best spot in your home to set up homework areas for each child, keeping in mind the personality of each. Does Johnny focus better with others around or by himself? Is Sally better suited to sit at a table or curled up on the couch? Corral **homework tools and supplies for each person** into individual containers and store in a nearby bin or hang in an organizer on the back of a door.



What about all those papers that come home from school needing your attention; the piles of junk mail, bills and invitations? Hunting papers wastes time and when bills aren't paid or permission slips aren't turned in, the price for disorganization is paid in late fees and lost field trips. **Create a place for your homework, as well.** You can share a space with your kids or designate a separate quiet area. Adopt one of the suggested storage solutions for your tools and supplies and keep near by. Set up a filing system for important papers and receipts. One option is to use a binder with tabs or a plastic accordion file. For the binder, use clear page protectors (found at office supply stores) and insert your papers. Label tabs for utilities, credit, banking, medical, etc. You might even want to have a separate binder for each child and file special papers and important documents such as copies of their birth certificates, immunization cards and school information.

7 Turn back the clock Sleep is when the brain gets reorganized. Getting enough sleep improves mood, concentration and decreases irritability. Generally, teens need an average of 9 hours of sleep per night. Younger children need at least 10. As adults, we need 8 or more. If your family member has a short attention span, is irritable, has unusually low energy or is more impatient than usual, he probably needs more sleep. Set a firm bed time and wake-up time for all members, which includes you! Limit late nights. Keep bedrooms dark and consider turning off or removing electronic devices from all bedrooms. Experts say that the **artificial light from computers and TV screens tells the brain that it's not time to wind down yet.** And every ring and ping from cell phones are debits from our sleep hours.

While we can't eliminate all the school-year stress, making these small adjustments should make it a little easier.