

organize today!

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

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The Successfully Organized Student

It's easy to think that by simply purchasing some neat, new school supplies, your student will instantly be transported to "most organized kid." (Remember how cool you felt with your Trapper Keeper?) But even more important than the physical tools we give them are the routines and habits we encourage.

This issue of *Organize Today* will help your student set up a great study space at home, maintain a tidy desk or locker at school, keep paper clutter at bay, and — hopefully — manage to get out the door on time each morning. Here's to a successful school year!

Identify the challenges



As you ponder how to best help the kids in your life be more organized (and therefore, more successful) in school, consider what's troubled them (and you) the most in the past. Once you

define their challenges, concentrate on simple solutions, and watch them reach new academic heights. Here are some common student organizational challenges and solution paths.

CHALLENGE: Struggling to complete homework. There is no defined study area and/or time. School supplies are hard to find. **SOLUTION:** Determine when and where child will do after-school homework. Set up a homework "command central."

CHALLENGE: Time management issues, such as being frequently late for school or activities. **SOLUTION:** Teach your child to use tools such as planners or calendars to track activities, upcoming tests, and assignment due dates.

CHALLENGE: Difficulty maintaining a clean desk or locker, resulting in disorganization at school. **SOLUTION:** Pop in before or after school periodically to help your child organize his desk. Give older children proper tools and advice to organize their lockers.

If you notice your children struggling because of disorganization, don't wait until it's too late to give or get help. Discuss issues with the teacher, create a strategy for success with your child, and consider bringing in a professional organizer for added guidance, support, and creative ideas.

Create a successful study space



If you want to raise successfully organized students, you must give them the tools to succeed. A proper

study space — that is both comfortable and fully stocked with school supplies — is essential to get kids motivated for after-school studying.

Start by deciding where your kids will do homework. Involve them — ask where they prefer to study, considering their age and independence level. Do they like the privacy and quiet of a desk in their bedroom? Or do they want to be near you in a centrally located space such as the kitchen or family room? Once you decide, make sure it's well stocked with supplies. If your child has a desk, you may choose to organize supplies inside the drawers or in containers on top of it or on shelving above it. Make sure to categorize, containerize, and label items (such

as writing utensils in one area, paper in another) so the desk drawers don't become chaotic catch-alls.

For those working outside their bedrooms, create a portable office. This will allow them to work anywhere inside (or even outside) your home. A tackle box or any type of small storage box (even a shoebox) will do. Fill it with supplies, such as pens, pencils, sharpeners, crayons, markers, highlighters, colored pencils, glue sticks, scissors, tape, stapler, paper clips, ruler, calculator, sticky notes, paper, and any other supplies that your child frequently uses. Keep an age-appropriate dictionary handy. Also consider keeping a small stock of rarely needed but important project accessories, such as report covers and poster board.

At the end of each study session, remind your students to pack up the supplies so they're ready for the next day's use. Teach them to make a list of items that need replenishing. Maintain consistency but allow for flexibility for guaranteed-happy kids!

Get the routine down

Most people aren't born organized. It is a skill that is learned. Just as children are taught how to do long division, hit a baseball, or play a musical instrument, they can be taught how to organize their space, time, and tasks. It's your important job, as the adult in their lives, to pass along helpful tips for organizing success. Here are a few ideas:

- Help create a habit of doing homework in the same place, at the same time, every day.
- Teach time management skills. Encourage younger students to look at the family calendar each day so they know what's coming up. Middle and high schoolers can use a planner to track assignments, large projects, upcoming tests, extracurricular

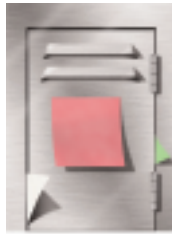
activities, and appointments. Help them see that some things will take a long time to accomplish, while others take only a few minutes.

- Help them prioritize tasks each day, focusing first on assignments with the most urgency or earliest due dates. Teach them to use high-energy times to their advantage: It's often best to do the hardest thing first, rather than saving it for the end of the evening when they're tired. Or have them start out on a good note by tackling one quick, simple task first to get momentum going, followed by the hardest assignment. Older students will benefit from creating to-do lists: Teach them to use two task groups: an urgent, "do it today" list and a less timely "do it soon" list.

Neat space

Maintain an organized desk and locker

Although kids may appear organized at home, a peek into their desks or lockers may surprise you! Even an organized kid can create chaos in those small, often neglected spaces.



ELEMENTARY AGE

If you're concerned about the state of your child's desk, contact the teacher. Perhaps she could hold an "organize your desk" time once a week or month that would benefit all of her students. If your child needs extra attention, ask the teacher if you could stop by before or after school some day for a brief desk tidy-up. Teach your child to take home food containers daily, toss garbage, purge papers that are no longer needed, and keep important take-home papers in a certain folder. See what type of order makes sense for your child. Perhaps she associates colors with certain subjects, so notebooks and folders could correspond to those. Maybe she likes all the notebooks on one side of the desk and the folders on the other. Or perhaps she prefers the items she uses in the morning on one side and afternoon items on the other. Whatever makes sense for her is okay, as long as she understands and maintains the system.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL AGE

This age can be more challenging for parents to help, because you'll likely not be invited into the school by your student. But you can assist by providing helpful locker accessories like an extra shelf and a magnetic pencil cup and memo board to make staying organized as easy as possible. Discuss ways to organize your student's things (see prior paragraph) in a logical order. Encourage frequent clean-outs. If it really gets out of control, give her a large garbage bag and have her bring everything home over the weekend. Spend time helping her to sort, purge, and rearrange. She can return the organized items to her locker on Monday.

ALL AGES

Inventory students' school supplies at least twice a year and restock anything broken or used up. Check in frequently to see if their desks or lockers need tune-ups and help as necessary.

Guide to making smart "keep vs. toss" decisions

Are you overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork that comes home with your child? Lunch menus, notes from the teacher, graded papers, homework, and artful creations are just a sampling of the types of paper you must wade through on a daily basis. Get it under control by following these guidelines:

- First off, dedicate a folder or 3-ring binder for papers that you frequently reference. You might place lunch menus, schedules, calendars, and class lists there. Keep it in the kitchen for easy access.
- Each day, sort through *all* papers that come home with your child. For those that require action (signing permission slips, writing checks, etc.), place them in a to-do tray and get them done by day's end.
- Realize that although your child's work is special and meaningful, not everything must be saved. Toss routine papers such as daily assignments. Save only those things that really showcase your child's uniqueness: their first perfect spelling test, a special book report, an inspired illustration, or an art project that is truly wonderful. Remember: You don't need to save *everything*. When you do, you can't truly appreciate *anything*. In a storage box, save only those that make you smile, laugh, or cry. Twice a year, assist your child with a collection "viewing," while sorting and downsizing a bit more.

Out the door, in the door



If your mornings are chaotic, follow these get-organized tips to ensure out-the-door ease.

- Make mornings flow smoothly by getting everything ready the night before: Have school bags packed and placed by the door and tomorrow's outfits laid out. Pack the non-perishable parts of the lunches, so you can simply pop in a sandwich in the morning. Set the breakfast table.
- Create a checklist of kids' to-do's (make bed, comb hair, brush teeth, etc.), and post it on the fridge or bathroom mirror. Likewise, create an "out-the-door" list of items they need to take to school, and post it on or near the exit door. You might include things like homework, lunch, snacks, library books, instru-

ments, and gym shoes. (Some neat, ready-made checklists called *Get Your Gear* are available from www.simplyordered.com.)

- Organize your kids' arrival: Declare a proper destination for backpacks and school bags in the entryway, install hooks at a kid-friendly height, and have your children put bags there as they arrive home.
- Teach kids to empty out their backpacks right away after school. Immediately bring homework to their designated study spot, place papers that need parental review in a designated basket or tray, and put lunch containers in the kitchen. Encourage them to place coats, shoes, and hats in a designated spot to avoid frantic morning searches.