

Sick of the clean-up battles? Tired of hearing "Mom, where's my...."? Do the kids ignore your threats of "You will clean up this room"? Do you ask your children to put away their toys 20 times & they still won't do it? Do you resent always giving in and doing it all by yourself?

The ability to organize is not innate. It's a learned skill just like reading or math. Teaching your child organizational skills is a difficult, but worthwhile project that benefits both you and your child. Developing these skills will; facilitate his/her chances for academic success...enhance independence and self esteem, improve the ability to work cooperatively as a team member, increase productivity, efficiency and responsibility.

1. SET A GOOD EXAMPLE

As the parent, you are your children's primary role model, and if you aren't organized, your kids are being sent the wrong message. If you have a cluttered and disorganized house, do not expect your child to actively declutter and organize his/her space. Remember: "Actions speak louder than words".

2. DON'T DO IT FOR THEM

If you want them to grow into responsible, self-sufficient adults, don't clean up their messes. If you do, you're not only putting more stress on yourself, but also depriving them of a chance to learn and grow.

3. KEEP IT SIMPLE

Have you ever noticed your child's coat sitting in front of the closet instead of inside? That is because most children are "one-steppers". They complete tasks that take one step and avoid complicated systems. Use hooks and cubbies with specific purposes for ease of use.

4. ESTABLISH HOMES & ZONES

Everyone knows where to find a spoon in their house. Develop "homes" for your children's things with that level of commitment, and put those homes in the "zones" where they will be used.

5. ROUTINES & HABITS

Routines standardize processes and make tasks to remember and complete and form habits. Use labels when establishing habits. Labels call children to make that extra effort to put things away.

6. GIVE THEM OWNERSHIP

Never attempt to declutter or organize their "stuff" without their permission, input, and active participation. It's their room, their "stuff" and their mess. They need to be involved in the process, especially the decision making - what to keep, where to keep it.

7. MAKE THEIR CHORES AGE APPROPRIATE

Assign realistic, age appropriate chores to minimize the child's frustration and increase his/her sense of accomplishment and mastery. For example, a 3 or 4 year old can be given the task of putting their dirty clothes in the hamper, but folding and/or putting away their clean clothes would be more appropriate for a 5 to 9 year old. Design systems appropriate for your child's size and point of view.

8. REWARDS & REMINDERS

Implement a reward system. If they do what you want, within the time frame you set, reward them with privileges or praise. Eliminate nagging or power struggles. Begin teaching them to eliminate excess and unwanted things at an early age. Schedule some annual "Dejunking Days" and have them participate in the process. Some good times would be right before Christmas or their birthday or during the change of seasons.

9. TEACH THEM THE CONCEPT OF ENOUGH

Teach your child the concept of enough. If they never know what "enough" is how do they ever feel the satisfaction of reaching that goal. Children are bombarded with sophisticated media urging them to consume and collect. Help them become aware of needs vs. wants and how "more" often becomes a burden.

10. TEACH THEM THE VALUE OF GIVING

Teach your children to select things to give to less fortunate people and to make room for new things to come into their lives. Always place a container for donations in a highly accessible area and praise children when they contribute to others.

Teaching and modeling the skills children need to have order in their lives is a life long gift. Children can grasp these concepts and develop good habits at an early age, however it is never too late to set your children up for success with simple systems, techniques and strategies. For more information on organizing visit the Pittsburgh Professional Organizer's Website at www.pghproorganizers.org.

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