



AUGUST 2007

Organizing Children for Success

“How do I teach my child to be organized?” one parent asked. This is a very good question that many parents are concerned about. It’s always best to teach your children organizational skills as soon as they reach the level of understanding what you say. Even around the age of two, most children can learn the skill of organizing their own toys. However, many parents make the mistake of exclusively putting all of the toys back themselves. This bad habit can also lead parents to cleaning their children’s rooms. At this rate, unless your child has a natural gift, he or she will never learn the necessary skills of organizing. Without organizing skills, some children may fall behind academically or socially. Fortunately, it’s never too late to teach disorganized children the basics of organizing.

Start by approaching him or her in a loving manner, with a non-judgmental attitude. Find out what’s working well in their space and what’s not. Ask a lot of questions to get to the bottom of their disorganization.

Examples:

Q: Michael I noticed that you’re having a hard time putting your stuff away. Can you please tell me why your things are always on the floor?

A: I don’t know where to put everything. It’s easier for me to find what I’m looking for when I spread them out. Then, once I find what I’m looking for, I’m too tired to put it back.

Q: Sarah I know you have a hard time cleaning up your room. Can you please tell me some of the reasons why you don’t clean your room regularly?

A: I’m too busy to clean my room. Besides, I like my room just the way it is.

Some answers your child may give you will seem a little vague but keep asking questions until you understand the root problem.

Explain to your child in a non-critical way that it’s time to develop a plan for him or her to get organized. You may struggle in the beginning so move forward at a pace that’s not overwhelming. Work on one area at a time and make a serious effort to ignore the rest. No one can become completely organized in one day or even a week. Work along side your child to create a system that he or she can manage. Most parents come up with systems that they enjoy and expect their children to follow them to perfection. Wrong! Get your child involved in developing a system that works with their learning style and habits. Explain the purpose of each system so that he or she will understand the benefits of maintaining it. You can even show your child pictures of what an organized room looks like.

Teach your children the basics of organizing:

1. Purge at least 2-3 times a year--more if necessary. Things accumulate in everyone's environment and purging is necessary to maintain every system. Get rid of things you no longer have use for.
2. Sort through all your remaining belongings and categorize them. Put toys with toys, books with books, clothes with clothes, etc.
3. Make sure everything has a home. Homeless belongings tend to cause confusion.
4. Let your child maintain his or her own system-not you.
5. Follow up to see how things are going. You'll know their systems are working properly when they can find things with ease.

Teaching children organizing skills is challenging but the reward is their success. Just knowing that they can take care of themselves and be productive in society will bring nothing but satisfaction and peace.

If you're having a difficult time teaching your child to organize, seek professional help.

Suggested reading: *The Organized Student* by Donna Goldberg. This is a fabulous and very informative book on how to teach your child organizing skills for school and beyond.