



Neat Freak Press

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Ten Tips for a More Organized Life

By PERRI KERSH

Have you given up on having an organized home? Waiting until the children go to college to shovel out the clutter and start fresh? As you crunch your way across a Cheerio covered floor in a room that looks a little like a yard sale in progress, can you really imagine _____ (fill in the blank) more years of mess?

First, a reality check. Living in a home with young — or even not so young — children means that it's impossible to ALWAYS be ready for the *House Beautiful* photographers to pop in for a photo shoot. But it is possible to maintain some order in your home. Here are 10 suggestions for taming the clutter, getting your kids involved and organizing your way to a simpler life.

- De-clutter every day. Everyone has an area that accumulates stuff (mail, mittens, magic markers, etc.). Set a timer for five minutes and tackle that area every evening before bedtime. Waking up to a less cluttered home will start your day off right.
- Make your bed. Not to sound like your mother, but this simple task can take even the messiest bedroom from disaster area to not-half-bad in two minutes or less.
- When possible, avoid putting paper in a horizontal position around your house. Horizontal paper quickly becomes a pile, which can then become an avalanche. Save yourself time and frustration by categorizing and finding a home for paper as soon as it comes through the door. Use file folders, a 3-ring notebook or a vertical magazine sorter to hold important papers. And immediately pitch what you don't need.
- Think vertically in all rooms of your house. Consider using shelving and hooks to keep tools, bikes and sports equipment off the floor of your garage. Hang shelves up high in your child's room to keep prized possessions, such as trophies or keepsakes, within sight but out of reach.
- Group items by use in your kitchen. Keep your coffee mugs near your coffeemaker. Keep all baking materials and tools in one cabinet. Place dishes and glasses in cabinet space near your dishwasher to make unloading trouble-free. Place healthy snacks in a low cabinet your children can access independently.

- Manage toy overload by having a toy swap with friends in your playgroup. Rotate toys so that even a rainy day can feel like Christmas with "new" toys your child hasn't seen in a while. And purge toys before holidays and birthdays to avoid overwhelming your child and your toy room.
- Don't expect your children to cheer when you ask them to clean their rooms. Make it easy and fun for them to participate in clean up every day by having a family clean-up song, or use a hula-hoop and only have them put away the items inside of the hula-hoop. Make the size of the task appropriate to their age.
- Avoid bathroom brawls by giving each member of the family their own colored basket stocked with toiletries for the bathroom. Throw out products that haven't been used in six months. And use hooks rather than towel bars for children to encourage independence.
- Use baskets around your house to collect toys. Consider having one in every room so you can quickly clean up if a surprise visitor arrives.
- Assess your organizational goals. Rule out perfection, and opt for a more organized, less stressful environment that allows for more time to enjoy your children and your home. ■

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