

organize today!

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

An Organized Household

How do you keep your busy household running like clockwork? This issue of *Organize Today* teaches some easy-to-implement ideas for getting—and keeping—your home neat and organized.

It all starts with a plan. Once everyone is on board, commit to an annual clean-up day and daily tidy-up time. Clutter doesn't stand a chance! Then, keep vital information at your fingertips by creating a handy household reference binder and maintaining a family calendar.

Stick to it, and you'll soon find yourself living in an organized, peaceful home.

The family meeting



Ready to get your household organized? Like all important tasks, a little planning goes a long way. The first step to creating an effective organizing strategy is to hold a family meeting. Gather everyone who lives in your home, put out some treats, and start the discussion.

Begin by determining key areas that need help. Is your basement or garage a total disaster zone? Is your collection of kids toys out of control? Do your mornings need streamlining so everyone can get out the door on time? Now is the time to list these areas for improvement. Jot them down in a notebook, and prioritize them. Create a timeline to spur you into action. For example, schedule an upcoming weekend for tackling a large organizing project, or break it down into smaller sections and plan to work for a couple of hours once each week. If you need help creating an action plan, a professional organizer can assist you.

Declare a point person for each job, then list all the job helpers and their required duties. Remember, one person didn't create the mess, so one person shouldn't be stuck cleaning it up. Get the whole family involved and you'll quickly be on the way to an organized, happy household!

Declare an annual clean-up day



Has clutter taken over your home? Get it under control with an annual clean-up day, scheduled a couple weeks in advance so that every member of your household can participate.

Decide which areas to tackle first. Whether you start with a common area, such as the family room or kitchen, or a personal

space, such as a bedroom or home office, it may be helpful to work in teams. Having a partner to keep each other motivated and objective is a very necessary part of organizing. Even kids can (and should) participate.

Gather supplies, including garbage bags for anything broken, stained, or expired. Label cardboard boxes for “donation,” “move to another room,” and “repair.” Have water and quick, healthy snacks on hand to keep up energy levels.

Next, begin the sorting process, creating logical categories for the room in which you’ll be working. For example, in a child’s room, you may place stuffed animals, books, games, clothing, and school supplies into separate piles. Once everything is sorted, determine items that can be tossed or donated. (You probably have more than you realized!) Place these items in the garbage bags and boxes, and remove from the room as soon as possible. As you encounter items that should be stored in other areas of your home, place those in the designated “move to another room” box. Deliver these items to their appropriate “homes” once the box is full. If something needs repairing, and you can commit to the time and cost of the job, place it in the “repair” box.

Once you’ve sorted and purged, take some time to thoroughly clean the room. Dust and vacuum, and give the windows a spritz of cleaner. Make it shine! Finally, determine the best location for each category of items. Invest in sturdy organizing containers that fit the space and decorating style of the room. Fill the containers, place them conveniently, and leave the room filled with only things you truly need, use, and love. Plan to repeat this process annually, or more often as needed.

Keep it neat with daily tune-ups

Getting organized involves two stages: the big clean-up and the daily tune-up. While you can certainly *get* organized with the big clean-up, you won’t *stay* that way without the daily maintenance.

Here’s how you do the Ten-Minute Tidy-Up: Gather everyone together at a convenient time. (Right after supper or before bedtime often works well, so that each day is started with a neat home.) Assign each person a room or area of your home. (Or, you could all begin together in one room and move around the house together as a team.) Set a timer for ten minutes, put on some fast music, and instruct everyone to grab anything out of place and return it to the proper location. Garbage goes in the trash. Dishes are loaded into the dishwasher or sink. Toys are put away. Clothing is hung, folded, or put in the hamper. Magazines are stacked, blankets are folded, and pillows are fluffed.

When the timer goes off, you’ll be amazed at what you accomplished in just ten minutes! Now, commit to keeping your household neat by getting in the habit of cleaning up *every single day*. If you do it daily, and everyone helps, it will seem almost effortless.

All in one place

Create an effective family calendar

Busy families need a household calendar. By having one central location to jot down activities, meetings, and appointments, the entire family will function more smoothly.

Begin by purchasing a wall calendar. You'll find a variety of sizes and layouts at your local office supply store or online. (The wall calendar at www.momagenda.com is great.) You can also use an online tool such as www.cozi.com, which helps you create a free, web-accessible calendar. If you use this, be sure to print out an updated version each week. Then find a convenient place to hang it, such as in the kitchen.

Start adding dates and activities. You'll want to include vacation days from work and school, medical appointments, after-school activities, sports practices and games, trips, parties, play dates, and meetings. (If you have a consistent work schedule, you don't have to list that on the calendar. However, if you have a meeting outside of your normal office hours, jot that on the calendar so your family is aware.) You may want to color code the listings, assigning a color to each family member. Keep a pencil or pen attached to the calendar, using string so it doesn't mysteriously disappear.

Instruct all family members to add their activities to the calendar as often as possible. Have everyone (including kids) look at the calendar each morning so they are aware of the day's activities. Hold a brief family meeting each Sunday evening to go over the upcoming week's events.

While family members may still have their own individual calendars, planners, or PDAs, remind them of the importance of communicating schedules to all family members through the family calendar.

Easy access

Put together a family reference binder



Wouldn't it be great if you could *instantaneously* locate your favorite restaurant's take-out menu or your kids' sports schedules? It's easy when you keep your information

stored within a family reference binder. All you'll need to create one is a 3-ring binder, a paper punch, paper, tabbed dividers, and some clear sheet protectors or Avery® 3-hole binder pockets. (These are available at your local office supply store.)

Now start planning your reference binder's sections. Each household is unique, so start thinking about the types of papers you frequently need. Some categories ideas include:

- church/worship
- day care/babysitting
- gift-giving/birthdays/party planning
- home improvement
- meal planning
- medical/health and fitness
- restaurant menus and coupons
- phone numbers
- school/lunch menus
- sports/extra-curricular
- vacation/travel/fun activities

Write the category names on the tabs, and search your home for papers that fit in each section. You can stash papers within the sheet protectors or 3-hole punch them. Add papers as you receive them, change categories as your household evolves, and weed out the binder every few months. Now you're organized and ready for any papers that come your way!

The out-the-door launching pad

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Allowing new possessions to enter your home is easy. Open door, carry in! But, do your things have an easy exit strategy, as well? A key component to good organizing is knowing what needs to leave your home and actually getting it to the correct location.

One great way to accomplish this is to set up an out-the-door “launching pad.” Dedicate one basket near the door for items that need to leave the house, such as library books, rented DVDs, dry cleaning, and things to be delivered to family or friends.

What types of things need to be transported from your home to a new location? Perhaps you have clothing that must be returned to a store or shoes that need repair. Toss them in the launching pad basket! Then, each morning, take a look in the basket to see what you can get rid of that day. Instruct family members to do the same. You might consider keeping a “transport” basket or box in the front seat of your car, as well. (The trunk is too out-of-sight, out-of-mind so don’t stash stuff there.) Try to empty the basket daily.



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