

From *All of You Magazine*
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Question:

When I asked my 14-year-old son to organize his room. He asked me, “Where should I start?” Since he has outgrown a lot of his things, but might not be quite ready to let them go, I realized I had the same question.

Answer:

Your son might have a lot of toys; action figures, matchbox cars, etc. that he might not play with any more, but isn't quite ready to let go of. Let's see how we can help him.

First of all I would suggest that you work with your son through this process and not expect him to go it alone. Create categories and sort the items he has, then categorize these items by his level of interest in them. Once he sees the amount of toys he no longer wants to spend time with, maybe you can convince him to part with some. For the items he is not willing to give away just yet, but doesn't need close at hand, find some clear plastic containers and use them for storage. Put these in the basement, storage area, or even on a high shelf.

Now that you have eliminated the items that he will no longer be using, let's go about storing the things that remain. Keep like items together; all books in one place, trophies, video games, etc. Here are a couple of storage ideas:

- ❖ For VHS tapes, you can purchase an over the door rack that is only seen from inside the bedroom when the door is closed
- ❖ Place a high shelf (12" from the ceiling) across the area of one wall for trophies or awards, that way they aren't taking up precious space, but are still visible
- ❖ Don't overlook dresser drawers, they can be used for more than just clothes
- ❖ A bookcase for storing video games, CDs, books, etc. or
- ❖ A number of shelving options that you can find at IKEA, The Container Store, or even your local hardware store

Once you have finished, congratulate yourselves on a job well done. Maybe lunch out together is in order!

Question:

I work full time and feel very organized at work, however, I have a difficult time organizing my time and space at home. I do a great job of it in the office, projects done on time and so forth, but when I get home I hit a brick wall. I sit and contemplate the things I need to be doing, paying bills, laundry etc. but just can't seem to get motivated to do them. What do you suggest?

Answer:

This is not an unusual situation. We give so much of ourselves to our jobs that when we get home at the end of the day we are tired and not ready or willing to give any more, we are done!

Since you mention being so organized at the office, I suggest you spend time at work doing one or more of the tasks you would typically deal with at home. How about if you take your bills with you one day a week and pay them during your lunch hour? Get a container the size of a shoe box and fill it with all of the items you use when it is time to pay those bills; envelopes, pens, a calculator, stamps, return address labels and anything else you can think of that you need to get this job done. Have a quick bite to eat and then get down to work. You are in the right frame of mind, in "work mode," and you won't suffer any of the distractions that you have at home. You can also use this time to answer invitations, write notes to friends and any other jobs that are easily portable.

For the jobs that have to be done at home, for example the laundry; make a deal with yourself, reward yourself. As soon as you get home toss in one load of laundry, have that cup of tea you wanted and sit down with that magazine that just came in the mail or whatever else you like to do. You will be able to enjoy these pleasures more because you are not feeling guilty for not doing anything at all since the laundry is getting done. Set a timer for 20 minutes and when it goes off, put the clothes in the dryer. If you are an early riser and a "morning person," you can take ten minutes in the morning to fold that load of laundry and quickly put it away. If you do one or two loads of laundry a few times a week, it is a job that is tackled without much fuss. Laundry gets overwhelming when we leave it for too long. It's always best to just stay on top of it by doing a little at a time.

Question:

I would like to begin the process of organizing my kitchen. Do I have to do it all at once, or can I do it in steps? I have been living in my house for 15 years and who knows what I'll find in some of the cabinets!

Answer:

Great question. There is no reason you need to set aside an entire day to revamp your kitchen. You can certainly do it in stages. Before you start, get yourself a game plan. Open every cabinet, drawer, nook and cranny that you have and survey the entire situation. Then take some notes about where you want to keep all the items that you have. Like things together; all the Tupperware, pots/pans, casserole dishes, etc. Make yourself a little map of the kitchen and where you would like everything to "live."

Now, you can get started. Take one cabinet or drawer at a time and work from the top down. Take everything out of the section you are working on and place on the counter or table. Wipe down the shelf or drawer with some soapy water or an all-purpose cleaner such as Fantastic. Get yourself a step stool and get all the way in the back, corners and all! Take inventory of the things that you have taken out of the cabinet. Are they all items that you use on a regular basis? Did you find something you didn't even remember that you had? If you have items that you no longer have use for, broken, or maybe even still in the original packaging having never been used – donate them to a needy individual. It's ok if you got it for a wedding/birthday/Christmas present. We don't need to keep *everything*!

Now you can go ahead and put back into that space what will be there permanently. Designate an area in the kitchen for your "work in progress" and keep things there that do not belong in the cabinet you are working on. Also, designate an area for things that do not belong in the kitchen at all. When you are done with your work for the day, take the things you are keeping and put them where they truly belong and start a donate box for when you continue on with your project.

When you get to the pantry or food area, keep like things together there as well. Group your canned goods, by fruits, veggies, etc. Create a baking section, a pasta/rice/bean section, breakfast area – you get the idea. Be sure to toss outdated or "mystery" foods. If you have smaller children, you can create an area for their snacks so that they can help themselves when you say it's ok for them to do so.

Keep yourself on track by working on an area at a time on a regular basis. Throw away any broken or unusable items. Remember to store things that are used less often on the higher shelves or even in another location. Keep sharp objects out of kids' reach and make sure to have all cabinets and drawers protected with safety locks.

Enjoy your newly updated kitchen and let me know when I can come over for dinner!

Question:

I currently have a two-car garage and because of all the garden supplies, sports, equipment, kids toys, etc. we can only put one car inside. Any tips on how to get both cars back in?

Answer:

Follow these simple steps and you'll have your garage back in no time!

- Take everything out of the garage and sort items on the driveway, i.e., sports equipment, lawn maintenance, toys, etc. Throw away all broken items and mystery parts. Donate items that are no longer used.
Be aware that passers by will be interested in buying the things so neatly sorted on your driveway, wondering if you are having a garage sale. Don't be too quick to say no! Now is the time to get rid of a few things without the hassle of advertising and planning an official garage sale.
- Once you have the garage cleared, sweep the floor of all dirt, leaves, salt and debris. Sweep onto a dustpan and put into the trash as opposed to just sweeping everything outside. You'll be sweeping the dirt towards the items you have just placed on the driveway and the wind might blow it right back in!
- Clear all cobwebs from the corners, walls, and ceiling.
- If you have window coverings take those down and either wash or decide to buy new. Clean the windows.
- Create areas for your newly sorted items and bring back in from the driveway.
- Look beyond the floor, use wall space and ceiling as well.
Put heavy-duty hooks into ceiling rafters to hang bikes.
It is not necessary to spend a fortune on elaborate systems to organize your garage. Go to your local hardware store and see the many products they have to offer. If your family has trouble remembering which items go where; after hanging them all for the first time, outline the items so that they know what goes where when the spot is empty.
- Pull your car(s) in the garage and enjoy!

“Only in America do we keep our \$50,000 car in the driveway and all our “junk” in the garage.” George Carlin

Question:

Now with school starting how do I deal with all these papers that the kids bring home? Between permission slips, school projects, order forms – I can't keep up!

Answer:

It's always best to have a system in place for going through the backpacks when your children get home from school. Whether you are there to greet them or they come home from school on their own, they should have a specific place for their backpack to be placed as soon as they walk in the door. It can be a corner in the family room, a hook in the mudroom or even the closet by the front door; whatever is most convenient for your family. Keep in mind, that sometimes "out of site, is out of mind," so don't hide them too far away.

Designate a time for you and your child to go through the backpack together. Right before homework is ideal. Set aside 10-15 minutes to go over any assignments or previous homework papers with your child. Sign any permission slips, note the date on your calendar and return them *immediately* to the backpack. You might also want to include any special instructions on your calendar, i.e. appropriate dress, bring a sack lunch, etc. The same goes for any order forms, complete them in this designated time and return *immediately* to the backpack as well.

As for all those school projects and beautiful artwork that our children bring home, we really don't need to keep everything. Do you still have every project you ever did? They aren't very special if you keep every one. For the papers and projects that your kids bring home, you might want to buy a clear plastic storage bin to put everything in for the current school year; some might be on display for a while, and then placed in the bin. At the end of the year go through the papers with your child and decide on keeping a few of the special ones. An idea for some of the holiday items would be to keep them with your holiday decorations. The kids enjoy seeing their special projects and artwork every year, as they grow older. For more of the more cumbersome projects that would be difficult to keep due to size, etc. you can take a picture of your child next to the project and keep that instead.

Start the year off in an organized manner, remember to stay on track with your decisions and you will enjoy a less stressful year! You will be teaching your children great organizing skills as well.

Question:

Can you give me some tips on organizing my bedroom closet? It's a fairly good-sized walk-in closet, but it always seems to be overflowing and I can never find anything!

Answer:

There's nothing like having a neat and organized closet to help you start your day on the right foot. Mornings are hectic enough without having to fight the battle of finding what to wear!

The first thing you have to do is set aside some time to tackle this project. This is a job that is not as easy to do in small steps and best if it's completed all at once. Get yourself some boxes or bags for the items that will go, put on some good tunes and turn off the phone.

Now, we get down to work. We are going to create three categories; keep, donate and launder or repair. Go through everything in your closet with a fine tooth comb. If you haven't worn something in the last year, it's time to let it go. If something appears to be beyond repair or it's something you wouldn't feel comfortable wearing, let's toss that. If it is something that hasn't fit you for a while, let's get donate that as well. You might have a friend that you can "swap" clothes with. You might even enlist this friend to help you with your closet organizing and then you can return the favor. Lay all the clothes you would like to keep neatly on your bed and/or on the floor, use the bags or boxes for the donate items and for the launder or repair pieces.

After everything is out of the closet, dust the shelves and vacuum the floor. Let's start with a clean slate! Now decide on how you want to sort your clothes before returning them to the closet. Like things together; blouses, jackets, pants, skirts, dresses, etc. It is also a good idea to separate your clothes by season. Put the current season close at hand. If you are so inclined, you might also want to create categories for work/fun/exercise, etc., this is up to you and something you can decide depending on how specific you want to get. When you hang things back in the closet, you might also want to organize each category by color. Black pants together, then gray, brown, beige, etc. This might help you eliminate a couple more pieces, as you didn't realize you had six pairs of black pants because they were hanging in separate areas.

Use the shelving for purses, sweaters and even shoes if you have the space. Otherwise shoes can be lined up on the floor or in a variety of storage options; separate purchased shelving specific for shoes or even organizers that hang on the back of the door. If you don't like your shoes out, you can store them in their original boxes or purchase clear plastic ones. You can label the boxes or even attach a Polaroid photo of each pair. It's all a matter of what works best for you.

Now to finish the job, take those items you no longer need and find them a new home. Repair the lost button, ripped zipper, etc. and enjoy your "new" clothes! Remember all the hard work you put into organizing your closet and continue by putting things in their proper place as soon as they come back in. It only takes an extra minute or two to put things where they belong and it saves you time in the long run.

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