

As seen in the Ask the Organizing Expert column in the Lake Oswego Review and the West Linn Tidings.

Mom's Back to School Supply List

Question: What back-to-school tools do you recommend for keeping a busy mom organized?

School supply shopping is as fun today as it was when I was a student. My kids, long past the crayons and paste stage, still scour the aisles for just the right calculator or backpack. Last year my son hit the jackpot with a pencil sharpener shaped like a nose. "Shove pencil up nostril and twist" – huge laughs for the middle school set. Fuzzy pencils and a locker chandelier (really!) were my daughter's favorite finds. But why should they have all the fun? Mom needs fresh tools this time of year, too. Following are a few "school" supplies I couldn't live without:

A Smart Phone – no single tool has done more to keep a busy mom (executive/student/anyone) organized than the smart phone. At the very least it keeps your calendar, contacts, and task list in one place. Combined with a plethora of apps, it's also your meal planner, music library, camera and camcorder, boredom buster, navigator, reading material, house key, and Starbucks card. If you've already got one, I know you're with me. If you've yet to make the switch, rest assured they ARE everything they're cracked up to be. And you get to pick out a swanky case, too.

An Inbox – if a smart phone is the epitome of organize by technology, an inbox is the utmost in simplicity. Old fashioned to the point of being forgotten, the inbox is your answer to corralling household paperwork. Toss the bills, reminders, notes from teachers, and all things paper into your inbox. "Process" the contents regularly – but if you can't get to it every day, no worries – at least you know where everything is. Make it sizeable enough to hold a few days worth of mail and maybe even a newspaper or two, but not so big that it becomes a dumping ground for clutter. A drawer, tray, box or basket in nearly any texture will do just fine.

A Purse Organizer – if I had to make a true confession about my own organizing secrets, it would be this: my purse is a hot mess. I'm a stuffer, especially when standing in a checkout line, and I'm prone to shoving receipts, credit cards, pens, keys and gum wrappers in my bag, only to seethe with frustration when my phone (smart phone – how I love you) is ringing from somewhere on the bottom. So I solved the problem with a purse organizer. Relatively simple and inexpensive, a purse organizer is an assortment of pockets to keep all your pocketbook stuff neat and tidy. It can be moved from bag to bag. I can't say my purse always looks presentable, but I can get it back to snazzy in no time.

A Car Tote – most moms I know spend an obscene amount of time in their minivans and SUVs. After a day of car pools, sports practices, errands and work, an automobile can be quite the sight. There are car organizers that hold grocery bags upright, that corral tiny toys and games, that work as a mobile office, or that convert to a backpack for disaster preparedness. I simply keep a canvas bin on the front seat. I use it to carry things to and from the car, being careful to haul away the trash by day's end. Any bin will do, but make it light enough to cart around

A Spa Day – let's be real – the first day of school comes with a huge sigh of relief to many parents. Whether you work inside or outside the home, you've no doubt put in your fair share of hours toting kids to the pool, thinking up creative ways to pry them from the TV, and beating yourself up for not pushing that summer reading program. You deserve a little R & R. Treat yourself to a pedicure,

cappuccino with a friend, or simply indulge in a good book. Prepare yourself mentally for the nightly homework grind to come.

I don't know about your home, but in mine "if Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy." So organize yourself to organize your family. Put together a little back-to-school shopping list of your own. Tuck a new fuzzy pencil in your purse organizer. Upload the entire academic calendar to your smart phone. Ready yourself for the whirlwind of schedules and science projects and PTA meetings and soccer games. Consider yourself a shoe-in for the honor roll.

Danielle Liu, MPA, CPO® is a board certified professional organizer. She is the owner of Totally Orderly, a professional organizing company based in West Linn, Oregon. She can be reached at 503.750.7111 or Danielle@totallyorderly.com. For more organizing tips, visit her website at www.totallyorderly.com.