

*As seen in the "Ask the Organizing Expert" Column in the Lake Oswego Review and the West Linn Tidings*

## **Organizing Your Child for School Success**

**Question: My child is so disorganized it's having an impact on his grades. How can I organize him for the school year?**

Let's start with a pop quiz. True or False: Children are naturally organized? Organized parents have organized children? Schools teach students organizing skills? Answer: False, all of them. The truth is, some kids, parents and teachers are well-organized, but certainly not all. Furthermore, some of us are organized in our things, our thoughts, both or neither. Yikes! With all this diversity, how is anyone supposed to put order to all those books, papers and supplies?

Have no fear! Anyone can learn the fundamentals of organization, and everyone can benefit, even your own little "Messy Mikey." Strong organizational skills are frequently linked to academic success, which certainly leads to lifetime success; thus, having a solid foundation in basic organizing principles is worth any parent's time. Let's go back to school and review the basics.

**Lesson One – Organizing Things:** The ABC's of keeping order to your things are A – Assign Homes, B – Banish Excess, and C – Categorize.

First, items need homes. They really do. Assign a place for backpacks, worksheets, and books to eliminate lost homework, morning madness, and forgotten lunches. Little students practice this skill by putting away toys and laundry. Older students should have well-equipped study zones with logical places for their projects and binders.

Second, we have excess stuff, and so do our kids. Teach them early to banish or recycle those things they no longer love, need or use. Small children can learn about recycling and donating, while older kids can earn money at garage sales.

Finally, categorize your things by collecting like items into suitable containers. Teach young students to sort art supplies into labeled bins or create a home library complete with "subjects." The ability to categorize results in older students who can take notes, outline chapters, find patterns and write reports.

**Lesson Two – Organizing Paper:** Adults are drowning in paper, and based on my child's Friday afternoon backpack, kids are too. Teach your child to manage paper using the FAT technique – file, act or toss.

Papers to keep are either filed for reference, like a completed paper, or filed for action, like a project outline. Everything else can be tossed. Elementary school students can learn simple filing by keeping assignments in a take home folder or dropping permission slips into Mom's inbox. Middle and High School students are ready for desktop file boxes and binders with subject dividers.

**Lesson Three – Organizing Time:** Do you get "lost in time," "lose track of time," or have "no sense of time?" Can you anticipate delays or plan ahead? All students should be taught the three P's of time: the Passage of Time, Using a Planner, and Project Management.

Understanding the passage of time is more than simply telling time. Expose young children to analog clocks, not just digital, and show them how time passes. Post calendars so they can see the progression of weeks and months. Time homework sessions and have your child feel the length of 30 minutes. These tricks are great for adults, too!

Older students can be introduced to Planners, an essential time management tool. Let them choose paper or electronic and show them how to log deadlines, make checklists, look ahead and balance their workload.

Project management begins with a child's first book report. Demonstrate how to break a project into smaller tasks and plan backwards from the due date. It's a skill they'll use for the rest of their lives!

Children don't have to be "Neat Nicks," but being a well-organized student doesn't hurt, either. Make sure your kids are grasping the basic concepts of organizing things, paper and time, and you'll note a positive impact on your child's report card. Here's to an A+ year of academics!

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