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**never underestimate the power of caring**

## Get Organized!

*Dad, I can't find my homework!"*

*"Did you look on the table?"*

*"Yes; it's not there!"*

*"Hmm . . . did you look under your backpack, jacket, and lunchbox? Because that's where I found it."*

Organization means different things to different people, even within families. Getting organized can mean a household in which everyone pitches in to complete chores, it can mean finding time for complex science fair projects, or it can refer to juggling complex family schedules. Teaching kids the skills to plan future events, manage homework and activities, and be part of the family team that keeps the household running smoothly is a great parenting gift that serves children well into high school and beyond.

### **Tips for . . .**

#### **All parents**

- Organizational skills can be taught. That's why schools invest in planners for students. Bring your children into the family planning and decision-making process for vacations and celebrations, schedules for family computer use, neighborhood block parties, and so on. It does take more time, but it's a positive investment in children's growth.
- Resist the urge to buy expensive products that will help you organize. Instead, start by taking a quick inventory of your home to see if there are three things you can do to improve your family's organization. Then do it!

#### **Parents with children ages birth to 5**

- Use simple storage methods, including baskets or tubs with large openings, for putting away children's toys, books, and other supplies. Kids can learn to help pick up and store their belongings at a very young age. (And that's empowering!)
- Let children help you as you make lists for groceries, errands, or family chores.

#### **Parents with children ages 6 to 9**

- Start using a family calendar to write down everybody's commitments so that the whole family can keep track of who is going where and when. A family whiteboard can also be a useful method of keeping track of commitments.
- Remind kids that when they complete their chores, they help the entire family.
- By the time children are nine years old, many families are using planners to track kids' homework assignments, big projects, and extracurricular activities. Remember to check the calendar each night together.

- Be intentional about letting kids make plans for a family party or event. Let them help make guest lists, plan the budget, shop for food and decorations, and enlist family members to make the event a success.

### ***Parents with children ages 10 to 15***

- If your child hasn't started using a planner, now is the time to learn how. Track homework and big projects that have long term deadlines. Talk about how to break up big projects into small pieces so that deadlines are not melodramatic events. Check planners together every night.
- As your family organizes its commitments, avoid connecting "getting organized" with getting rid of stuff. While it's a good strategy for most adults, young people may feel nervous and threatened if they think they have to part with items that are important to them or even part of their identity.

### ***Parents with children ages 16 to 18***

- Expect your teens to play an active role in keeping your family organized, from doing their chores to giving you advance notice when they need your help, money, or permission to participate in an activity, and so on. If your teens aren't helping out through good communication, you may want to stop bailing them out at some point and let them deal with the consequences.
- Consider using a large white board as a family calendar or planner. There are also tools on the Internet that can be accessed by all family members. In this way you can all keep track of each other's activities, whereabouts, and needs (such as transportation).
- If your teenager still has trouble organizing or completing homework, call or e-mail your school's guidance counselor and ask about the kinds of organizational assistance that are available. If you don't receive a satisfactory answer, schedule an appointment and have the conversation in person.

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