

## Are Toys & Children's Clothing Cluttering Your Home? Spring Is the Perfect Time to Sort, Purge, & Clean

By Jennifer Lucarelli

For most kids, birthdays and holidays are the best time of the year. For most parents, they dread the additional toys and clothes that children receive and wonder where they will store them or how to get rid of them.

Shrewsbury mother of three Michelle Duke said she goes through their playroom prior to each holiday.



"Since I know more stuff is coming in, I know I have to make room for it," she said. "Our kids have so much more toys than we did as children and it's hard to know what to do with it all."

Duke said she gives toys and clothing to parents who have children younger than her three, who are all under the age of 7.

"It's so nice to know that another child will play with the toys or wear the clothes and enjoy it," she said. "Some parents might not like hand me down toys and clothing, but I know we appreciate it when we get them."

Duke has contemplated selling some items on eBay auctions or through yard sales, but said it is very time consuming. "I want to get it out of my house as quickly as possible," she said. "And I also donate items to the Shrewsbury Child Development Committee's annual toy sale."

The local parenting group runs an indoor toy and baby gear sale where people can donate toys or sell items themselves after buying a table for a nominal fee.

"It's such a great way to get rid of your old toys, baby clothing and gear without the hassle of your own yard sale," she said.

Professional organizer Elizabeth Goodsell said options like eBay, Craig's List, or other online auctions are a great way to sell items.

"You can also do local stores like Children's Orchard or a consignment shop that gives you money for your items," she said. "But that can be time consuming and you decide that for yourself."

With most online auctions, you include a digital photo, and then the item needs to be packed and shipped.

"All of that takes time, and most parents just want to get the items out of their house as quickly as possible," said Goodsell, owner of That's Neat Organizing.

Gail Gonthier-Bell, owner of two Children's Orchards shops in Milford and Westborough said many parents keep a bin or bag in their child's closet for donations and one for selling items.

"Parents bring us their bin and we tell them how much their items are worth and then they get the money right then or they can get a gift certificate to use at our store," she said. "Selling items online is another option, but that can be costly to ship larger items."

Gonthier-Bell said their shops take the larger items like strollers, baby furniture, and other larger baby items.

"You also get more money for your clothing if it is clean, in good shape, and a more expensive brand like Talbot's or Ralph Lauren," she said. "We'll tell you up front how much we'll give you and then parents decide if they want to donate it or sell it."

She said she knows how quickly her children grew out of their clothing and how many extra toys they had just lying around.

"I have some parents that decorate a pretty box in their closet and when it gets full, they drop it off to us," she said. "That way it doesn't take much time and they can clear out their children's items on a regular basis."

In addition to selling items, there are also benefits to donating items to a local charity like the Salvation Army or Goodwill.

"You receive a tax credit depending on what the total amount the items are worth," said Tom Langdon, director of community relations & development for the Salvation Army. "We accept clean, useable items and they are given to families throughout the area. Last year the Salvation Army donated 250,000 toys to families in need."

However, with the toy recalls, some local charities are not accepting toys. Langdon said they accepted all toys and setup a process to sort the toys that were recalled. The Children's Orchard also sorts out the recalled toys, on a regular basis before items are sold to consumers, Gonthier-Bell added.

If toy and baby clothing clutter is overtaking your home, Goodsell said it is important to regularly sort and purge items your child is not using.

"Every season when you change your child's wardrobe, you can go through their toys as well," she said. "And definitely before birthdays and holidays when you know more toys will be coming in."

Duke said in her playroom each child has a large toy bin to play with on a regular basis. "Patrick, who is 7, has a blue bin that he puts his toys in and Madeline, who is 4, has a pink one," she said. "We have some larger toys for Peyton who is 2 and the other children, but they have to put away all their toys first."



She also used a bookshelf for smaller bins for all the little toys. Arts and crafts items and puzzles are stored under her bed in her bedroom.

"That way when they want something with a lot of pieces or that is messy, they can take it out and put it back in the same place and not make a huge mess," she said. "And that way we also don't lose the small pieces."

She regularly purges items every three months. "If something is missing pieces or broken, it goes in the trash - I don't donate those things - no one likes to play with a toy without all the parts," she said.

Arlington mother of two Cindy Revelle said she has had success with Craig's List.

"We needed to get rid of a large mattress," she said. "But mostly I donate items to the Salvation Army - they have a truck that comes around if you call for pickup," she said. "Or I donate old toys or clothing to other parents I know."

Revelle is lucky to live in a neighborhood with a lot of children. "We have an e-mail list of all the parents and if someone is getting rid of a stroller, they e-mail everyone and then if someone wants it, they will leave it outside their house," she said. "It's a great way to get rid of clothing and recycle as well as getting to know your neighbors."

She also hired a professional organizer to help her make better use of her space and help everything find a logical space. "It helped me to realize that I can purge bit by bit and it will make a huge difference," she said. "As parents, we have so little time especially with schedules that our time always seems to be interrupted."

Ann Ostrowski of Lexington also worked with a professional organizer in an attempt to keep up with the overwhelming amount of toys and clothing for her three children, Max, 5, Jackson, 3 and Delilah, 4 months.

"Since my boys are so close in age, they used a lot of the same things," she said. "But it was hard to keep up with them and put things away."

She found that putting some toys away and hiding them for a little while before donating items was a good way to see if the boys actually missed their toys.

"Sometimes they came out, but most of the time I was able to put them in a box and donate them," she said. "I also learned it is impossible to clear out the toys when the boys are awake."

She said they also get rid of the small fast food toys that come with meals and those endless tiny items that come in goodie bags.

"We went to one birthday party that was a toy swap," she said. "The kids loved it and they all gave a toy and came home with one that they loved."

Whether you need to declutter the whole house or just your child's room, there are many places to donate or sell your child's older clothing or unused toys. Goodsell said it's important to come up with a plan that works for you.

"You don't have to alphabetize your soup, unless that works for you," she said. "Keep like items together and toy storage doesn't have to be expensive it just has to be functional and work for you."

Stacey Jackson of Holden is a mother of two daughters, Megan, 6, and Allison, 2 and said she has a hard time getting rid of her daughters' clothing and older toys.

"I keep taking it out of their room and putting it in the attic or basement," she said. "But I'm not ready to go through it, yet."

Her system works for her family, and Goodsell said one of the hardest things is figuring out what to hold onto and what to get rid of.

"You have to reframe your thinking because it can be paralyzing to not know what to hold onto and what to get rid of," she said. "I'm a mother myself and I struggle with the same feelings every day." Goodsell's daughter Paige is 4. "It's hard to let go of things that were special to you."

*Jennifer Lucarelli is a Shrewsbury-based freelance writer and mother of two boys.*