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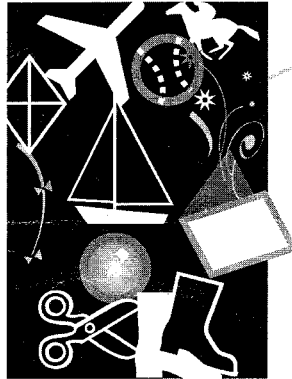
Lessons of Value:

Simple Steps for Organizing Life with Kids

By Elizabeth Goodsell, Ed.M.

*In ev'ry job that must be done
There is an element of fun
You find the fun and snap!
The job's a game.*

— "A Spoonful of Sugar" from
the movie *Mary Poppins*



In the classic movie *Mary Poppins*, the amazing nanny Mary simply snaps her fingers and all the toys fly back to find their place in the nursery. What parent wouldn't welcome help from Mary! While we can't call on her for help, there is a basic strategy you can learn to help you tackle any organizing project — big or small — in a snap. I'll demonstrate this approach through an example, give you tips for some common organizing issues facing parents, and share my biggest organizing secret.

Why is organization important? In our fast-paced world, organizational skills can help children be successful in school and beyond. Many kids thrive on structure and routine at home, as in school. This doesn't mean you have to have a spotless home all the time, but you can teach organization skills explicitly, such as having your child put away toys and laundry, and implicitly through modeling good habits.

Here is how you can get started.

In *Organizing from the Inside Out*, organizing and time management expert Julie Morgenstern shares her SPACE method. As a professional organizer, I use this approach in my own home and with my clients. **SPACE** stands for Sort, Purge, Assign a Home, Containerize, and Equalize. Morgenstern carefully explains each in detail. But as a busy parent, you might value a practical example of the method.

The **SPACE** Approach in Action

Here's an example of using the SPACE method to organize a child's toy area. Before starting, be sure to have two boxes. One will be for

items you find that go to another room, and the other will be the give away box. Also have a trash bag and recycling bin handy.

Sort

Pull out all the toys and do a "quick sort" to group them by category: dolls, cars, building blocks/legos, or arts and crafts supplies. If there are toys in other rooms that belong in this space, bring them in and add to the appropriate group. Feel free to tackle the toys in stages. For example, start the **SPACE** approach with just the games and then move on to the dress up clothes. You don't have to do it all at once.

Purge

Go through each toy category and consider: Does my child still play with this or have they outgrown it? Is it a favorite or only comes out once in a while? Purge the toys that aren't favorites.

Assign a Home

Now find a place for each toy category. If you have more toys than homes, you will need to continue to sort and purge.

Containerize

Look at what containers you have and see if they can work for the categories. Keep it simple. For example, put all trains into an open basket and all arts and craft supplies in a clear plastic storage bin. Use labels — words and pictures — to help kids put things away themselves and build their independence. For more hints on containers, read below.

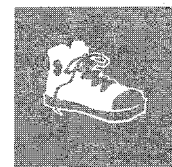
Equalize

In this important step you take stock of how things are working. Changing habits — both yours' and your child's — takes time. Live with the new process or system for a few weeks and then assess: Can your child easily find things and put them away? Are you spending

(Continued on page 4)

in this issue

<i>Lessons of Value:</i>	
Simple Steps for Organizing Life with Kids	1, 4, 5
Presidents' Message	2
What's Going On!	3
Playgroup Connection	5
Community Service	5
Parent Talk's Used Clothing, Toy & Equipment Sale	6
Community Events	7
Member Benefits	8
Calendar	9
Things to Do	10
Classifieds	11
Help Wanted	11

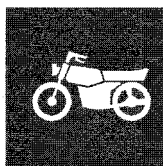


less time doing the cleanup yourself? What isn't working? Make any adjustments necessary and keep going.

One more note: Depending upon the age and attitude of your child, you may be able to go through this process with them. For many parents, you will be organizing on your own. In this case it is especially important to show your child the system you set up. Even simply telling a young child that books go in this bin and cooking things go near the toy stove can help. And don't forget to put your own things away regularly...modeling behavior for children goes a long way at creating a culture of organization and independence in your home.

Tips to Tame Common Trouble Spots

Many parents are fairly organized, but welcome tips and tactics for the challenges of organizing when young kids are in the picture. When I help parents get organized, some of the key issues I hear about are keeping up with toys, clothes, and school papers. In addition to using the SPACE methodology above, here are some tips to help address these specific areas:



Toys

- Choose appropriate homes for toys. In shared family spaces such as the living room, use low bookshelves, covered baskets, or cabinets. In your child's room, use containers such as clear bins, toy chests, open baskets or bins, and shelves. Be sure your child can reach the storage area, or the toys won't go back!
- Help your children get in the habit of putting toys back in their home by spending a few minutes cleaning up every day. Make a game of it. the sillier the better. When my daughter was three, I got her to put all of her blocks in their container by pretending it was a hungry monster that needed to be fed blocks!
- Consider the "one-in/one-out" rule: When a new toy enters your home, find one that can be donated or stored somewhere else.
- Rotate some of your toys: Periodically put some toys that aren't current favorites in a box to be stored in the attic or a closet. A few months later, bring them back — they may be more interesting after your child hasn't seen them for a while.

Children's Clothes

- Only keep clothes that fit and are seasonally appropriate in your child's dresser or in the front of the closet. This will help avoid your child insisting on wearing shorts in freezing cold weather! Also, start a routine of purging your child's clothes each Fall and Spring.

- Create a "To Donate" box and keep it in a closet. As you find clothes that no longer fit, immediately put any you don't wish to keep into this designated box. When the box is full, bring the items to a charity.
- Enlist your child in keeping clothes organized by showing him/her where everything goes in their dresser and closet. Make it easy by keeping all the bottoms in one drawer, tops in another, and underwear/socks/PJs in another. Label the dresser drawers or closet shelves with words and pictures, just like in an elementary school classroom.
- If you purchase clothes out-of-season, store them in a clear container. Label the container with the contents ("Anna clothes for fall") and put it in the back of your child's closet. When the season comes, look through the container before you go shopping — you might have forgotten what you bought many months ago.

School Papers

- Create a designated home for all papers coming in/out from school. Many clients like to use a desktop file box or "in" box for this. Check the box every night and morning.
- Sign and return any school forms as soon as possible. Keep every thing you'll need such as pens, notepads, and the stapler in this area.
- Assign another folder or box to hold special projects and artwork throughout the year. At the end of the school year, have your child help you select their very favorite pieces to keep in a special box as an archive of their work.

My Biggest Organizing Secret: Start a Reset Routine

Finally, I'd like to share my biggest organizing secret: Create what I call a reset routine. According to the dictionary, "reset" can mean to set anew, or to start again. I like to apply this to getting organized because "being organized" is not a constant state. As Kathy Wadill notes in *The Organizing Sourcebook*, life events will inevitably cause organizing systems to get off track. This includes major changes like moving, a new job or having kids, and shorter-term events like coming home from vacation, feeling too busy or getting over a cold. Even having a busy week can throw you and your family off track.

For my family, the work week can be hectic. Our routine is to try to reset each Sunday afternoon/evening. We put away the toys, artwork and other things that haven't found their way "home" in the past



playgroup

For more information contact:

playgroups@parenttalk.info

Playgroups are a wonderful way for parents to connect. Playgroups do more than offer children the chance to socialize and play. They also provide opportunities to share the ups and downs of life with small children and a way to get answers to those burning parenting questions.

Parent Talk Playgroups offer **3** ways to connect!

1) Playgroup Coordination

Parent Talk's playgroup coordinator matches Parent Talk members with similar-aged children and forms playgroups. Group formations are ongoing.

If you are interested in learning more about any of the following groups, please contact Sneha Campanella at 444-2284.

DAY	A.M.	P.M.
Mon.	'06 babies	mixed-age siblings
Tues.	'07 babies	mixed-age siblings
Thurs.		mixed-age siblings
Fri.		mixed-age siblings

Other groups forming:

- Experienced Moms contact Mara Gorden marag@thegordens.com.
- Playgroup for Children born between 3/07 - 6/07. Contact Jennifer roman_jennifer@hotmail.com.
- "Two Under Two" contact Sari Musmon smusmon@verizon.net.
- '08 Babies contact Lynn Miller lmiller83@verizon.net.
- Babies born between 4/08 - 9/08 contact Catherine Buttner catherine.buttner@gmail.com.

2) Playgroup Social

Come join us for a mid-summer social on Monday, August 10 at 9 a.m. or 4 p.m. 41 Nehoiden Street (Home of Sneha Patel Campanella).

3) Parent Talk's Drop-In Playdates

On the 3rd Tuesday of every month, the Family Room will be open for a Drop-In Playdate. Parent Talk families with children of all ages are welcome.

week. I enlist my daughter's help in turning the living room back into a living room, instead of her rocket ship or doll's wedding party. We do laundry and some house cleaning. Perhaps most importantly, my husband and I plan for the week ahead and discuss who has late meetings or has to travel, who is picking up our daughter from daycare, and what we need to accomplish this week. Having this designated time in our routine to reset allows us to start off the week fresh.

In the course of living our lives we can't help but flow from organization to disorganization. Being aware of the need to reset — to put things back in place or take time for regular tasks and start anew — is the secret that will help get you back to the state of "being organized."

Like the magic items in Mary Poppins' carpet bag, I hope tools like the SPACE approach, special tips, and "the reset" can be pulled out when you need them most to bring order to your family life.

Elizabeth Goodsell is the mother of a five-year-old, professional organizer and the founder of That's Neat! Organizing (www.ThatsNeatOrganizing.com), specializing in organizing solutions for busy families. She earned an Ed.M from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and is a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers and National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization.

community service

The Needham Council on Aging is looking for volunteers for our Friendly Visitor Program to provide companionship to homebound elderly Needham residents. Visiting an elder in their home can reduce loneliness and improve quality of life.

Volunteers will be carefully matched with residents. This would be a rewarding activity for a parent and child to do together. At the discretion of the volunteer, activities may include reading, letter writing, telephone reassurance, games & crafts and other mutual interests.

The commitment is a minimum of an hour a week, at your convenience. For more information, please contact Paula Angell, Outreach Worker at the Needham Senior Center, 781-455-7555, x.212.