

How do I help my child get organized?

What are some ways to have a productive conversation about organizing materials and tasks with my child?

1. First, determine what mood both of you are in. Do you have enough time and patience to model good practice? If not, help the child find what he/she is looking for and get the assignment completed.

If you have time to be proactive, set a goal for helping your child find the best way he/she can organize him/herself. A common mistake is to teach the child “your way of organizing.” This system may not work for your child. It also prevents your child from knowing why something works and under which conditions it won’t work.

2. Discuss the three pitfalls to organizing. You may ask for examples when he/she has experienced these, observed these happen, or even when these things have happened to you.
 - a. **Procrastination**—putting something off until later that we could do now. The consequences may be increased stress, poor quality, causing someone else to be late or inconvenienced, or not having the materials you need to complete the task in a short period of time.
 - b. **Escaping**—Daydreaming or doing something else that we feel like doing more. The consequences may be that we forget to do the task, we don’t leave enough time to do the task, and someone has more work to do to help you get the task done.
 - c. **Deceiving yourself and others**— This happens when we don’t take an honest look at the amount of time needed to complete a task. Consequences include running out of time, not having the right materials, making your emergency someone else’s emergency which is inconvenient and increases your stress and frustration.
3. Pull out examples of what types of things have to be organized. Papers, assignments, tests, notes, worksheets, etc.
4. Ask your child to list the different ways things can be organized.
 - a. Alphabetically
 - b. Numerically
 - c. Most recent to oldest
 - d. Topic
 - e. Subject
 - f. Due date
 - g. Type of assignment
 - h. Relationships or level of importance
 - i. Other

5. Ask your child what types of tasks or things are organized in each way.
For example: Addresses and phone numbers or topics in a file drawer are usually alphabetical. Assignments or tasks are usually organized by importance or due date. Optional: Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of organizing things in these ways.
6. Given the examples, ask your child to think about what system will help him or her organize schoolwork. After your child has had a chance to think and talk through some things, you can offer examples of what works for you. Optional: If your child is willing to listen, take time to not only explain what works, but why you think it works.
7. Let your child organize all papers and assignments into the chosen system. Offer your help when he/she seems stuck on what to do next. Make a game out of having your child see how long it takes to find something as a test for the system's efficiency.
8. Ask him/her to think of times when the system will work and when it might not work. How will your child know if the system isn't working? Can he/she think of a back-up plan if it isn't working? At what point will you both need to come up with a new system?
9. Implement the system for a week and revisit how it is going. Is the child still implementing the system? Reward this behavior in some way. Remember organization is a skill that takes practice. If the system isn't being kept up, then talk about what isn't working.
10. Also discuss who will know about the plan. Should the teacher know about it? Would he/she like to you to share the plan with his/her teacher?
11. If your child seems overwhelmed by the task of organization, simplify the plan to include prioritized tasks only, building on more detail later.

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