

Clutter-free with kids? Organize it, store it, live the fantasy

Published: Wednesday, September 01, 2010, 5:00 AM



Helen Jung, The Oregonian

Follow

Share this story

Story tools



[View full size](#) Steven Nehl/The Oregonian Think about what kinds of bins you need before you go out buying them, Danielle Liu advises. In this 2005 photo, kids select bins from Storables in the Pearl District.

Many times I have walked by the rows of plastic bins at Fred Meyer or Target and been struck by my secret fantasy:

My crayon-littered, clutter-filled home is transformed into a haven of color-coded bins and boxes. Stacked neatly on shelves, each bin sports a clean, typed label, marking the contents. The floor is clear of the stray building blocks and debris that normally trip me up between my mad dash from the boiling pot on the stove to the toddler in the living room trying to open the front door.

Doesn't that just make your heart race?

0
0
15Share

It doesn't have to be just a fantasy, though.

Danielle Liu, a certified professional organizer (who knew there are such people?) advises that you start with this simple philosophy: Every single thing needs a home.

"Every toy, every piece of clothing, every shoe, every bit of clutter needs to live somewhere," said Liu, who owns **Totally Orderly LLC**, a home and business organization company in West Linn, and is past president of the **Oregon chapter of the National Association of Professional Organizers**.

Start by breaking up your house into zones. In a playroom, you might have a kitchen zone, where all the play food and kitchen toys belong; a video-gaming zone, where all the remote

controls and video games are stored; a building zone for Legos, blocks, little houses and similar buildings.

"Once you have zones, then it makes more sense where things belong," she said.

After you identify the zones, use "lots and lots of containers" to manage it all. Small containers for small things; big containers for big things. This will help prevent the all-in-one toy box clutter where small things fall to the bottom, never to be seen again.

Label the containers -- with words or pictures if your child doesn't yet read. Labeling is important because your system of organization might not make sense to your child and helps them to buy into the whole system.

Don't make it too complicated. Don't feel the need to over-sort items, she said. For instance, kids don't mind having all their blocks in one big box. They tend to dump it all together anyway.

Still not sure how to tackle it? Look for ideas at your child's preschool or kindergarten class. "They've done this for years and years," Liu notes.

Another key component for organization - Purge regularly.

"We Americans just have too much stuff and our kids have too much stuff," she said.

At least twice a year, work with your kids to weed through their possessions. "It's a great way to introduce them to charity and passing along to siblings or cousins," she said. And you could also encourage them by having garage sales where they can keep the money made from their stuff.

And a key to keeping it all together -- Maintain the space regularly.

There has to be a clean up process in place on a regular basis - daily, for instance, would be great.

Enlist your children in keeping things orderly with a rule that your child may only have one or two toys out at a time. It keeps "toy dumping" - in which your child dumps all his or her toys out and later leaves - at bay.

The rule also helps teach your child to put something away before moving on to something else, "a skill we could use for the rest of our lives."

So what are a professional organizer's secret weapons?

Hooks are great in bathrooms for towels, pajamas and robes; in playrooms for dress-up clothes, capes, halloween costumes, hats, dresses, purses and jewelry; in mudrooms for backpacks, coats and sports bags.

Shoebox-sized bins are great for small toys, Barbie shoes, Hot Wheels, little accessories. She uses them in the bathroom for hair accessories and little toiletries. She also uses a few of them inside a large dresser drawer where she divvies up socks, underwear and tights for instance into each of the bins.

Open shelves. Place bins on open shelves, versus putting them inside cabinets or closets.

Limit where kids' toys and possessions are allowed to be in the first place.

Go lidless. Lids, like cabinet or closet doors, are "just an extra step and when you add an extra step, kids won't do it."

Go vertical. Got a small house or apartment? Go vertical with tall shelving units, with lesser-used items toward the top. And be extra vigilant about minimizing the stuff you bring into your home. Buy one good set of building blocks instead of ending up with three different ones.

Liu points out that the principle of assigning a home for everything doesn't have to just be for toys. Use this zone-offense for closets too -- there should be a home for pants, shirts and shoes. Same thing for when the children are older and going to school -- where do backpacks, lunch boxes, permission slips for parents to sign, homework all go?

And a note to those ready to head off to buy some bins - it's best to first do your purging and organizing before buying the bins, so that you know which kinds you need.

Check out the **Totally Orderly website** which **includes loads of tipsheets** for **Back-to-School, organizing your pantry, papers and documents** and other tasks.

Here are **some more organizing ideas for parents and children from Simple Kids**; a website, called **Got Family? Get organized!** that offers organizing help; and **some ideas from Babble.com**.

-- **Helen Jung**