

FUNCTIONAL FASHIONABLE



Spring Cleaning for Young Kids

Kids start developing their organizational habits – or lack thereof – from a young age. Whether your child is five years of age or 10, it's not too soon to start teaching positive organizational behavior. And what better excuse than the arrival of spring?

If you're like many people, you're probably planning to tackle your own closets... and attic and garage... this season. And there's no more effective way to influence your child's behavior than by modeling your own. If my mention of a springtime "purge" is the first time that the idea has occurred to you, that's okay, too. Your kids will benefit from watching you pursue a self-improvement activity. It will demonstrate to them that learning is a lifelong engagement. Let your children learn about organizational techniques along with you and encourage them to support you in your efforts. It's a wonderful opportunity for some family time. Plus, you'll benefit from having a helper or two to keep your home in order.

There are many ways in which you can help your growing children create practical systems for space planning, time management and goal-setting. For very young children, however, the best place to start is with simple principles of ownership. Kids as young as three are already absorbing the messages of American consumerist culture, which encourages us to acquire an ever-increasing volume of "stuff." You can combat that influence, however. Take this opportunity to guide your child into developing a healthier relationship to "things."

Talk about the importance of donating to charity

Before you start any tactical projects with your child, discuss the need for people to share the world's resources and the value of donating to charity or passing things on to other children in your family or community. Explain that your family is going to identify some items you no longer use and give them to people who need

them. If your children aren't immediately on board, be clear that they have an opportunity to choose what they will donate. You might also allow them to choose the recipient of their donation. Assure them, however, that you'll make the decisions for them should they refuse. Approach this gently, of course. The goal of the exercise is to encourage future behavior rather than force it.

Take an inventory

Practice your kids' counting skills by taking an inventory of the items in his/her bedroom or playroom. You'll need to limit the time spent on this activity according to your child's age – perhaps five minutes for toddlers, 10 minutes for kids in grades K-2 and 20 minutes for kids ages 8-10. Tackle just one category at a time over the course of a week or so. Start, for instance, with books, games, puzzles, toys or stuffed animals. (Children under age 7 are not generally prepared to sort through clothing. I recommend that parents weed out old or outgrown clothes by themselves). Identify which items your child has clearly outgrown and agree that those should go to a younger child. If your toy chest is still overflowing – or even if it isn't – help your child choose one or two items that are less treasured than the rest and guide him/her toward being comfortable letting them go.

Highlight tangible results

Let your kids enjoy the fruits of their efforts. Bring them with you when you donate their things and applaud their generosity. Celebrate the occasion with a special treat for dessert one night. Some parents reward children who sacrifice old items by buying them something new. This can be effective but I prefer to acknowledge a child's selflessness with praise rather than reinforcing an attachment to "stuff." Consider bestowing an activity-based reward, such as a trip to the park or the movies. The memory of an experience will last longer than a cheap toy, and supports the

thesis that life is for living rather than owning.

Improve your own habits

Kids watch us more than they listen. "Walk the walk" by regularly taking an inventory of your belongings, donating items to charity and reducing your purchase habits. And before you pick up a free pen at a local bank, think to yourself, "Do I really need this or am I just taking it because it's free?" Be willing to let go of things and your children will understand that value in life is what we do and not what we have.

Healthy organizational practices develop into lifelong skills that reap benefits in all realms of life. Children who internalize positive organizational habits are better equipped to handle academic demands and manage professional pursuits. Later, they are prepared to manage the financial demands of adulthood, as well as to run a household of their own. One day, perhaps they'll be passing on these skills to your grandchildren, helping build a new



Marin Rose owns and operates Functional, Fashionable, a professional organizing, decorating and home staging business that also provides Masters preparation services. Marin comes to Augusta from Washington, D.C. For more information visit functionalfashionable.com.

generation of people who live in simplicity and order, and freedom from clutter and debt.

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