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Seasonal sweep

By Elizabeth Harmon
It's every parent's nightmare. It's 10:00 p.m. and your child says, "Oh, I forgot. I have to make a poster for school tomorrow."

Getting organized now can help tame the terror.

"Kids are going to be disorganized to a certain extent, so we have to be organized for them," says Clare Mantelman owner of Organize Now in Barrington.

While every home's organizing needs are different, families with school-age children can follow a few simple rules for a calmer, less cluttered school year.



(Photo provided.)

Mantelman suggests starting with paperwork that's still around from last school year, including artwork. Toss everything that's not needed. Limit keepers to art and writing projects that really show your child's thoughts, storing them in one accordion-style folder per child.

Too hard? Then imagine your child bringing home her fiancé some day and you dragging out piles of finger-paintings. "That fiancé is going to be kind of freaked out," Mantelman laughs.

Now let's look ahead. Set aside a spot — maybe in the kitchen, that's designated for the kids. On a low shelf your kids can reach easily, place a shoebox sized tub for homework and art supplies.

Put a larger container near the front door where kids can store papers, notes from the teacher, artwork, etc. As the year goes on, visit the box periodically and throw out what's no longer needed.

"I keep a tray for each child and everything that comes home goes there. It's one place to go to look for everything," says Michelle O'Connor, a Crystal Lake mom of three.

Stock up on poster board and store it between the wall and a filing cabinet or large appliance.

But kids aren't the only ones who need to get organized. Take one room at a time and sort what can be kept, donated or tossed. Storage containers of all shapes and sizes are on sale this time of year, so stock up.

And don't forget the garage. Mantelman advises moving everything out and following the same strategy you used inside. Toss out broken squirt guns, donate outgrown sports equipment, keep bikes, locks and helmets close together for easy access. Vertical shelving units, storage trees and heavy duty hooks can help maximize storage and clear floor space.

Now it's time to reward yourself — but not by going shopping for more stuff. Instead, schedule a house cleaning. Kelly Resek of Comfort Home Cleaning in Crystal Lake says the best time for a professional cleaning is when a house is tidy and organized.

"We are able to clean much more thoroughly when items are out of the way and surfaces are clear," Resek says.

A single cleaning typically includes dusting, vacuuming, complete cleaning of baths and kitchen, cleaning baseboards, woodwork, ceiling fans, light fixtures, window sills, mini blinds and floors. Cleaning jobs are priced according to the needs of each customer.

Regular cleaning will keep the house fresh and de-cluttered. In between, keep pre-treated cleaning wipes handy in bathrooms and kitchen.

"These are great products for quick clean-ups," Resek says.

While it takes a little effort at the beginning, starting the year organized means less stress for everyone.

"It gives me some sanity to have things organized. Otherwise, you just go crazy," O'Connor says.

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