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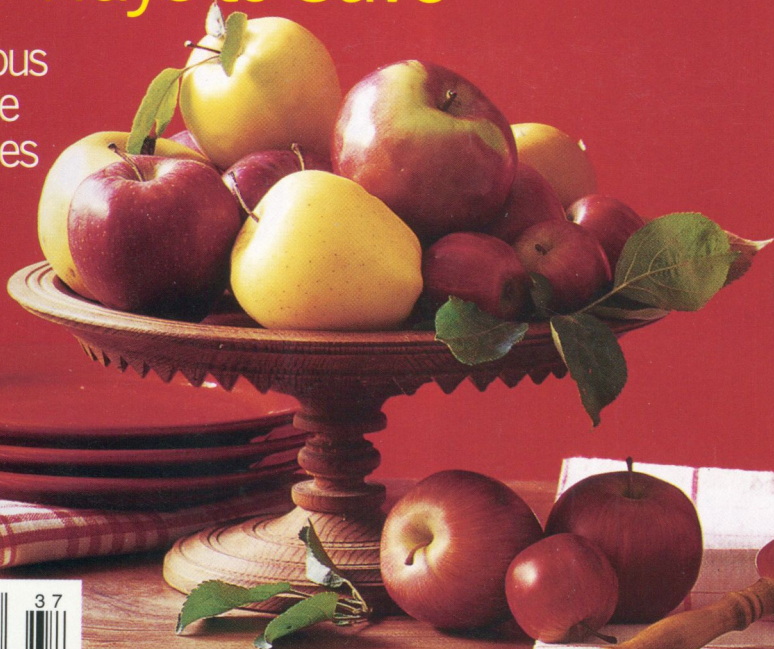
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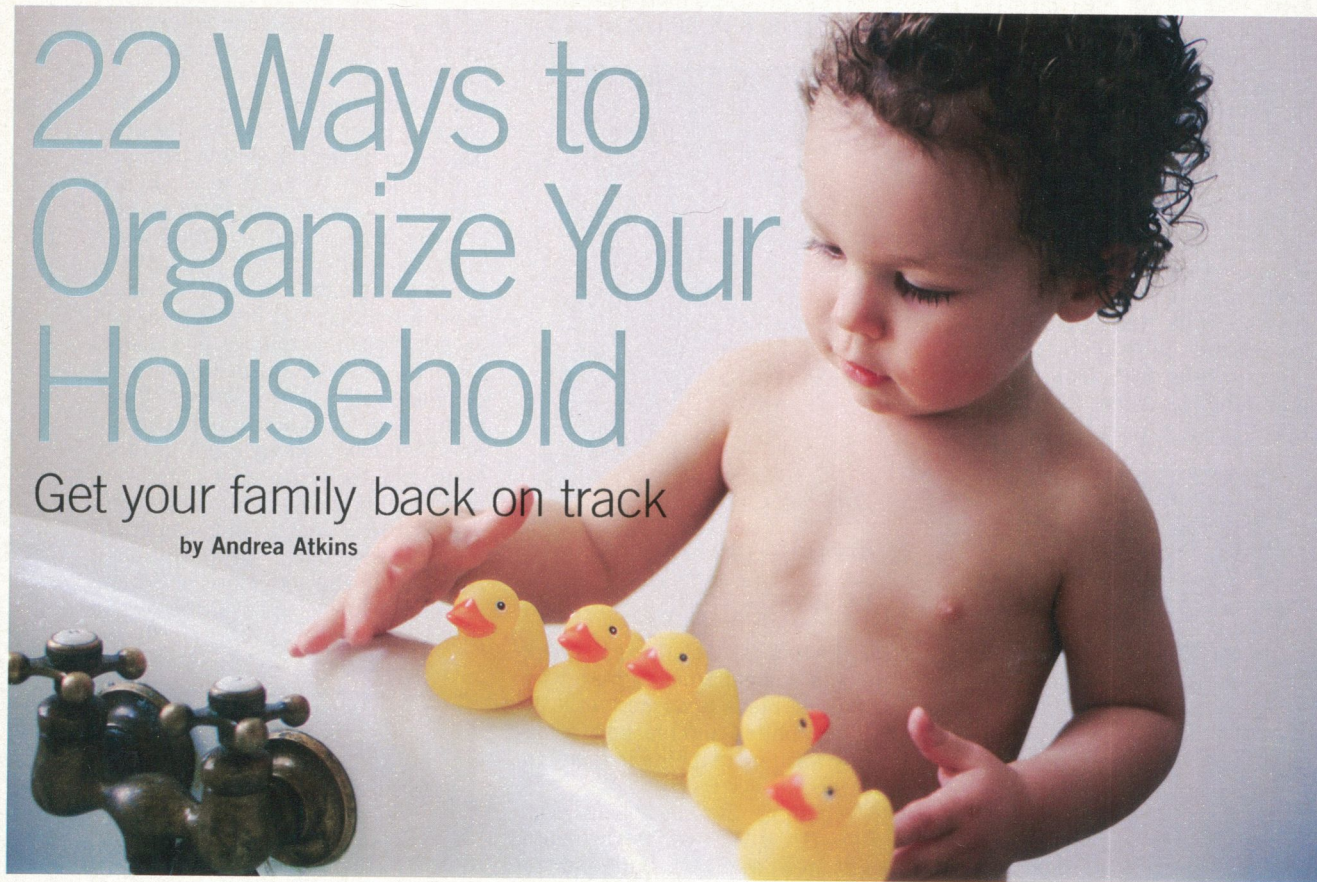


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22 Ways to Organize Your Household

Get your family back on track

by Andrea Atkins



Though I hate to admit it, I don't have it all together.

Neither, it seems, do a lot of women. "I'm the last person you want organization tips from," one woman e-mailed when I asked her for ideas. "You've got to be kidding—don't you know I'm a contender for the Most Disorganized Household of the Year Award?" replied another, missing the deadline I'd given for replies. But there is hope. There are those among us who keep their households running like clockwork, and they've shared their secrets.

Set Up a System

Label, label, label. "Everything in your house should have a home," says June Saruwatari, author of *Behind the Clutter: Truth, Love, Meaning, Purpose*. She suggests labeling each of your child's dresser drawers (shirts, pants, etc.), bins for toys and games, coat hooks, bathroom shelves, anywhere

that you want things to be returned. "That way you, your spouse and children know where everything belongs," she says. "And if your child can't read, use pictures."

Set up consequences. If things are not put in their proper home they should go into a "weekend basket," says Saruwatari, which means the items are unavailable to your child until the weekend.

Post the school lunch calendar. Put it inside a kitchen cupboard door where it's easily accessible yet out of sight. Have your children circle the meals they want so you can easily check when you'll be making lunches, says Maria Diele Margiotta, a public relations executive with two children from Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

Computerize your address book. Since her personal address book was never where she wanted it to be, Monica Levine of Baltimore transferred the whole thing to the computer, then printed out a copy to keep near each phone, as well as one for the car.

Create an action folder. Use this for invitations, tickets to upcoming events, announcements of tournaments or anything that's coming up. Also write the date on your family's central calendar. Then, when the date arrives, pull out the invitation, ticket or whatever information you need.

Create a pending folder. Many women get befuddled by

Please turn to page 100

tip

Wake up to fresh coffee by using a coffeemaker with a timer that's set the night before.

make sure you have the time to complete it once you start. That way you won't have clean laundry wrinkling in the dryer while your bath mats are getting moldy in the washer.

Keep a chore basket. List large chores that you've been meaning to accomplish: putting away the patio furniture, organizing the linen closet. Then when you have a little extra time, pull a task to take on. Or better yet, respond to a "bored" child with a slip of paper on which a chore has been written.

Capitalize on Sundays. Pick out a week's worth of outfits for your kids, hang them on hangers and then lay out one each evening, suggests Tanya Steel, mother of 6-year-old twin boys and a New York City editor. "That way there's no hassle in the morning and no extra chore to do in the evening," she says.

Share the Load

Involve the kids. Know in advance that children often need guidance. In other

words, they can make decisions on their own about whether or not they want to keep certain stuffed animals, but they probably can't handle the job alone if you say, "Clean up your room." So work with them to get organized. This teaches them skills they can use for the next task.

Make it fun. Once a week give each child a box and a room. Have him race around and clear out everything that doesn't belong in that area. Then have him put away all the misplaced items in their original homes.

Create meaningful rewards. "Instead of allowance as an incentive, my eight-year-old earns 'bones' toward getting the puppy he wants," says Lori Tucker, a single working mom from Dallas. "Each morning if he eats breakfast, brings in the dishes, gets dressed, brushes his teeth and gets in the car with his backpack and schoolwork by 8 A.M., he gets a 'bone' drawn on the calendar. Fifty bones and he is ready for the responsibility of a dog. It makes my morn-

ing much less stressful and I can get ready for work without constantly reminding him to get ready."

Craft a job wheel. Fashion a chore chart out of two paper plates (one large, one small) and a paper fastener. Put children's names on the inside plate and a list of jobs on the outside. Turn the wheel daily so no one gets stuck too often with undesirable jobs.

Add music. After dinner, Danny Hodge, 15, cleans up the kitchen while listening to his favorite radio station. "He dances around while he cleans up," says his mother, Cherie Rosen of New York City. "It also serves as a way for him to delay the inevitable homework for an extra 15 minutes."

Let kids decide. "I let my daughters, ages ten and nine, wear what they want, even if it's horrible and not warm enough for my standards," says lawyer mom Beth Davis, who works in Great Neck, New York. "This has greatly reduced the amount of time and energy we spend arguing, which makes it totally worth it." **WD**

ORGANIZE YOUR HOUSEHOLD

Continued

papers they're not sure what to do with: that announcement for a charity basketball game that might be fun to attend or the circus performance coming in two months. Put the notices in a pending folder that you take five minutes to go through each week, says Sharon Mann, organization expert for Pendaflex.

Create a save box. Whether it's a cardboard box or a plastic container, use one for each child's completed art projects and school work. Periodically review the contents with your child, asking, "Still want to save this?"

Batten down the hatches. Five minutes of cleanup a day will prevent a tornado of swirling clutter later, says Misha Keefe, president of Misha K, a professional organizing company in Washington, DC. Go through piles every Wednesday, so you're doing a small job each week, rather than a massive cleanup at month's end.

Pick the right spot. If you often lose your keys, your purse or other items, note the first place you look for them. Make that place the home for that item and you'll be less likely to misplace it in the future, says professional organizer Chris Perrow.

Keep the lights on. Don't turn off the lights until everything's ready for morning. Don't let your children get into bed until all their schoolbooks are in their backpacks, homework is signed, clothes are laid out and everything is put away. This makes mornings less chaotic.

Get It Done!

Make decisions. "Indecision leads to clutter," Saruwatari says. "If you don't know where to put something, it usually lands in a pile of things you don't know what to do with." Instead, touch each piece of paper once, deciding then and there whether to file it or get rid of it. The same advice applies to

other household items. Wash dishes right away and immediately put back any other items when you're finished using them. Letting things pile up only makes the chore more daunting.

Call in the recruits. Hire your niece, your high school neighbor or a friend's child to put your photos in an album, fold your laundry or help you clean out closets, suggests Celia Rocks, author of *Organizing the Good Life*. For a small fee, you can get a lot of help from young people. If your own children are old enough, enlist their help.

Show kids the way. "I put a brightly colored cloud sign on the kids' bathroom mirror (and another by the hallway light switch) listing what needs to be done before they come downstairs for breakfast: make bed, brush teeth, take allergy medicine, put dirty clothes in hamper, turn lights off," says Cynthia Pearson of West Des Moines, Iowa.

Schedule chores. Decide if you want to devote one day a week to a specific chore or do it as necessary. Either way,