

"This Is The Last Time I'm Bringing Your Lunch To School!"
TEACH YOUR CHILD TO BE ORGANIZED
by Mary Sigmann

How does it feel to be the only child left behind on the day of a class trip because the permission slip was forgotten or lost? This happens in households where organization and planning are neglected. Organizational skills can be cultivated, and are best taught early. It's much easier to teach your child to be organized than to continually nag, but the training takes commitment and persistence.

Organized kids feel more in control and competent. The entire household is less stressful and runs more harmoniously. If your children establish habits which prevent tardiness, forgotten supplies, and lost homework assignments, they will be happier and so will you.

TEACH PRE-PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Teach your kids to plan ahead by encouraging them to ask, "What is my goal, what materials do I need, and what steps are necessary to complete the goal?" Teach the concept of "preparation" by discussing how to plan for future events, tasks or outings. Talk it through step-by-step. Have a planning session each evening to go over the next day's activities.

TEACH CONSISTENCY AND ESTABLISH ROUTINES

Establish a practical routine for each task or responsibility that involves your child. There is security in consistency. Have a standard place and time for doing homework, and a designated space for jackets, gloves, and backpacks. Set up a center for depositing school work and a regular time to go over it together.

Allow your child to select a strategy that works well for them. If they habitually leave the house without their lunch sack or gym shoes, let them decide the best way to remember.

TEACH DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

Help children learn to make decisions by looking at the "who, what, when and where." If the question is whether to go out for basketball, many things need to be considered. When and where are team practices? Are special shoes, clothes or equipment required, and how much do they cost? Who will pay for that? What about transportation? Are there conflicts with other activities or duties?

If the child develops a sense of how each decision impacts other aspects of their lives, they will make better choices as they grow older and life gets more complex.

TEACH RESPONSIBILITY

Assign age-appropriate responsibilities. Give kids a role in the household which allows them to assist the family in operating efficiently. Explain how feeding the cat ensures the health of the family pet, and helps out other family members who rely on them to do that job.

Help your child learn to anticipate the consequences of their actions. What happens if homework is not ready on the day it is due? What are possible consequences of leaving a pair of shoes in the middle of the floor?

Encourage them to write down responsibilities on paper. A chore chart, or calendar showing what assignments are due and when, can instill respect for goals. Charting and list-making are skills that will have lasting benefits as the child grows older.

REINFORCE ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS WITH PRAISE

As your child begins to demonstrate behaviors that show pre-planning, consistency and responsibility, praise them. Let them know that they are capable, lovable and good.

By all means set clear rules regarding behavior that will not be tolerated, but notice the good things too. This might require something new from you as the parent: lightening up. Does the house need to be spotless? How can you relax your standards? The laundry that your child folds is not going to be as neatly stacked as if you did it. So what? You are instilling organizational and decision-making skills, and building character.

Mary Sigmann is a professional organizer, coach and speaker. For more information see www.organizer-coach.com