

Keeping up with clutter

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Once was an organized person. Not always the neatest, but usually very organized. Making lists and marking off completed tasks was my speciality.

Then I had children. As they grew I quickly lost my organizational grip. If you ever forgot to make cookies, or send 100 pieces of cereal to school in a plastic bag on the 100th day of school, as duly noted and requested by your child's teacher, you know what I mean.

This loss of control scared me. I think the worst was at 6:25 p.m. one evening when my son announced that we needed to be at school in five minutes for open house.

The school had sent notes via backpack about this special event to commemorate the newly remodeled school. But somehow it got lost under a pile of papers tacked not-so-neatly on the bulletin board.

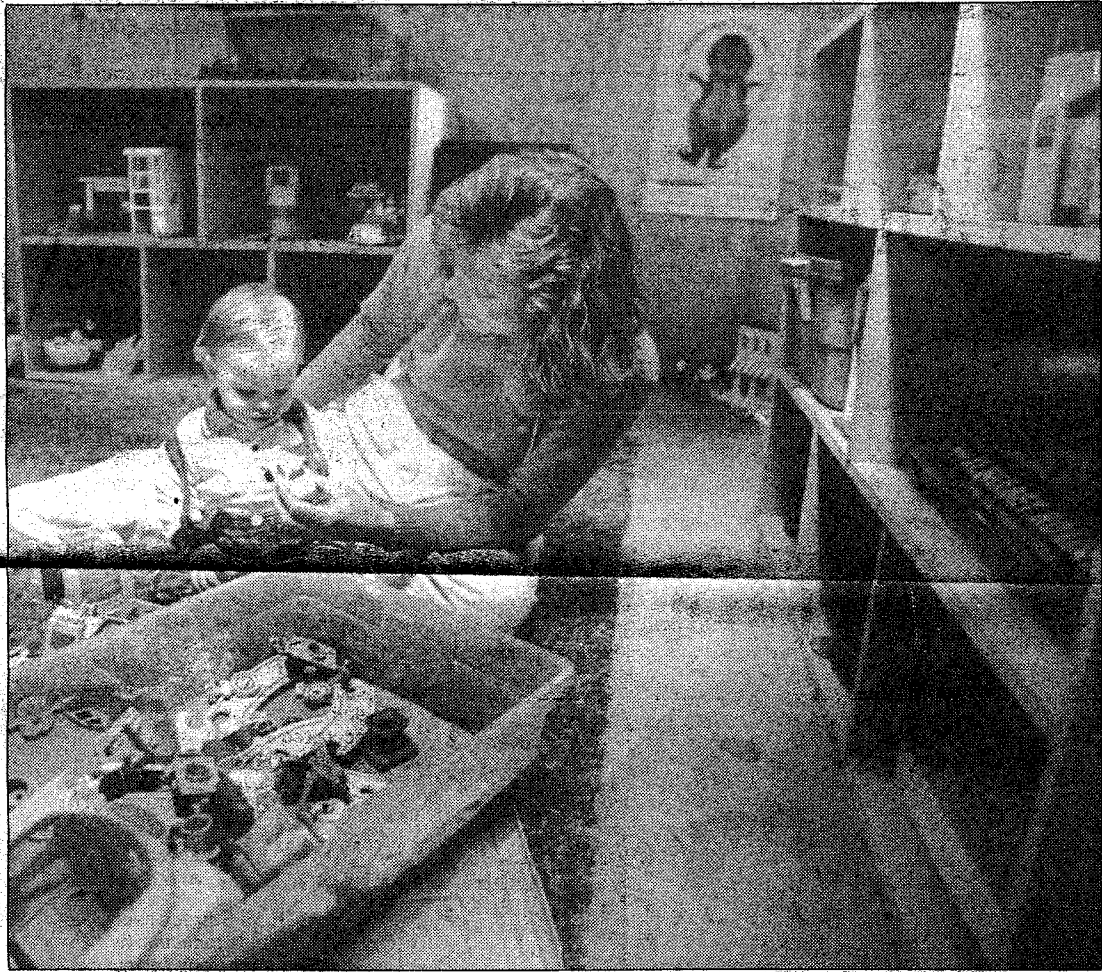
Not alone

Lack of organization is becoming enough of a problem that there are businesses that help families get back on track. And a Glenview nursery school recently sponsored talks for parents by a California woman who specializes in motivating people to get organized.

These professionals say that with a little planning, a few well-placed organizational tools and some effort by your offspring, you can keep your hectic lives in order.

Dee Vance works in the San Francisco Bay Area in California as a motivational speaker. She offers lunchtime brown bag seminars at large corporations, such as Chevron, which pay her to help their employees get organized at home.

She recently was in Glenview to help nursery school parents get organized. The worst disorganization is paper clutter, said Vance. "It



Bill Oakes/Pioneer Press

Toy storage doesn't have to be color-coded and designer perfect to be efficient. One way to keep clutter to a minimum, as Patty

Barone (shown with son Kevin) does, is to keep toys at easy access, in plastic containers kept on large shelves at a child's level.

doesn't matter what stage of life you're at or whether you are working or not working outside the home, paper clutter mounts up."

To keep down the clutter, Vance recommends opening mail right away, and tossing all the junk in the trash. "It doesn't even enter the home, because once it enters the home, it gets on that horizontal flat space where everything else gets stacked and the important things get put on the bottom and junk gets put on top and you can't get control of it."

For kids, the best thing is to go through their papers on a daily basis, if possible, said Patty Barone of Crystal Lake, who works for Chaos to Order, a growing Park Ridge business run by Monica Thompson. The company organizes offices

(home and business), designs custom closet systems and packs and unpacks and organizes after a move. And it helps families get organized. Prices start at \$40 per hour, with a three hour minimum.

Barone says try to take five minutes each day (make it a routine, if possible) and go through your child's papers, decide what to keep, what you can get rid of. Keep art work in a separate spot from things such as soccer sign up material and Girl Scout information.

If you have space in your kitchen, keep a cork board (for a decorator touch, paint it the same color as the kitchen, suggests Barone) where art projects can go.

For the other information, such as baseball sign-up sheets,

keep a vertical file. Vance suggests this file be kept in the family room or kitchen. "It doesn't do any good to have it upstairs in a back bedroom."

The files

Keep one file labeled TODAY — for things that must be done before you get to bed.

Another file should be for FUTURE-PENDING — items that require your attention before the week is over. You'll need to take a look at this a few minutes each day, or 20 minutes every couple of days, or maybe 40 minutes each weekend, just as long as you take some time each week to keep it in control, said Vance.

Yet another file should (Continued on next page)

be kept for **BILLS**.

Each member of the family should have their own file with their name on it. This is where you keep that soccer information and other paperwork that they will need.

An integral part of keeping stuff in order is to maintain a master calendar for the family. "You have to have a spot where you keep your family's schedule," said Barone. "I think it's easier for you to keep on top of it then."

When open house is coming up, mark it on the calendar, toss the paper

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reminder sent by the school, and make sure the calendar is in a place where the whole family can see it.

To keep newspapers, catalogs, and magazines from getting out of hand, the best rule is to remove yesterday's when you bring in today's (or this month's magazine when you bring in last month's). Vance said she keeps all periodicals in a box in the living room, and when she has extra time (watching a television show she's not very interested in or waiting for the kids to get ready for a game) she sorts through the magazines, cuts out any items she wants to keep for

future reference, such as "vacation ideas" or "decorating tips" and files them accordingly.

"And that way, you start getting your clutter into a vertical file rather than these horizontal piles," said Vance.

The kids' part

Kids are an important part of keeping a house organized. "If you are working you need children to really help and participate. And if you're not, you still need them to because you want to send them out into the world knowing how to do these things," said Vance.

It is a chore for you, however, until they learn how to do chores. But it's worth the effort, said Vance. "It's easier to do it yourself but the resentment you build up by being the person who does it all and the maid and everybody's servant doesn't help you as an individual, or the kids, or the family dynamics."

It took Vance six weeks to teach her kids how to clear the table and load the dishwasher properly, and a couple of months and one red baseball uniform to teach her boys, at ages 7 and 10 (when they enjoyed pushing buttons), how to do their own wash. But they learned and "I haven't touched the laundry since."

As for toy cleanup, make it a routine in the evening, or after other kids come to play, said Barone. Take 10 minutes and work together and everything will be back in order, before the mess gets out of hand.

Barone also keeps a hard wicker basket that matches the family room decor to keep toys at easy access and make cleanup easier.

Make it easy

It's important that you help kids help you keep organized by making it easy for them. Hooks for backpacks and coats at their level are a good idea, said Barone. Keep toys on large shelves in plastic containers for easy storage. Clear containers are best, because children can see what's inside easier.

These organizational tools don't have to look perfect, they're not meant to be decorator items, said Thompson. "Organization is about efficiency. It's not about how color-coded and nicely arranged things are."

Are you tired of nagging your kids to keep their room cleaned up? Younger ones may be motivated by a visit from the House Fairy, said Vance. Tell your children the House Fairy will come to their room and leave a treat on the bed if they hang up their clothes, put away their toys and make their bed.

"I can't tell you what my kids would do for that woman (the House Fairy) that they wouldn't do for me," said Vance. The House Fairy never left anything elaborate. "I'm not kidding you. Sometimes I would leave three raisins. I would leave a stick of gum. Nothing big." But the anticipation and excitement of this magical fairy got them in the habit of cleaning up, Vance said.