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Get Organized: 10 suggestions for keeping cool during school

By **LAURA LEIST**
SPECIAL TO PI

With the school year just under way, are you beginning to feel the stress of morning madness and the craziness of the after-school juggling act?

Make this school year different. Implementing some simple systems that family members make part of their daily routine can bring relief.

Children of all ages may benefit from a few organization systems in their life, and the home is a great place to start. Children as well as parents have a need for order and consistency in their daily routine.

Here are 10 products, ideas or strategies to help you and your children have a successful school year.

1. Buy a copy of "The Organized Student" by Donna Goldberg (Fireside, 288 pages, \$14), online through organizedstudent.com.

Forgotten tests, missing homework, overstuffed backpacks -- is your child overwhelmed at school? This is the first book to provide hands-on strategies that will enable students of all ages to use their time and energy more productively and acquire valuable skills that will last a lifetime.

2. Plan your days and months with a calendar that is suited for your family's busy schedule and all activities.

Whether you prefer a paper calendar, a dry-erase calendar or a computer calendar, there are many options to fit your style. With so many paper calendars available, you may want to first consider if you want the calendar to run from August 2007 to September 2008, or if your typical yearly calendar will do the trick.

Be sure that it's easy to get access to and that you look at it daily, so you can plan in advance. Involve your child with helping to keep his or her calendar up to date.

One of my favorites (not to mention fashionable) paper family calendars is made by Busy Body Book. It helps you coordinate up to five family schedules, side-by-side. Visit busybodybook.com to buy for \$16.95.

Two of my favorites computer calendars are Microsoft Outlook 2007 and Google Calendar.

An enjoyable new feature on the Outlook 2007 version is that if you use multiple calendars (one for you and others for your children), you can overlay all the calendars so you can see activities at a glance -- yet keep each calendar separate. You also can color-code appointments and set recurring appointments, so you have to enter piano lessons only once, instead of each week.

3. Back to school also may mean "back to chores," if they disappeared over the summer.

If getting those chores accomplished is a challenge, you may want to pick up a copy of *Spintastik for the Family*. If you are looking for a fair, peaceful way to assign chores, want a creative way to motivate children and want to reward good behavior, why not spin for chores? Decision making and delegation become fun and fair for the whole family with this creative, innovative learning tool. Available for \$19.95 from Sellers Publishing, rsvp.com.

4. Establish a place to keep backpacks for the evening after they are emptied.

A hook in an easily accessible location will help keep clutter off the floor.

5. Ensure that your child has a place to unload his or her backpack.

For papers that need to be signed and returned to school, teach children to place them in a designated area, where they will be easily spotted.

6. Children need a place to put completed schoolwork and artwork, once removed from the backpack.

This place may be temporary until a decision has been made as to what will be kept. Provide your child with an oversize, acid-free Profolio photo album that can be used to store the most treasured pieces from each school year. Although the albums come in four sizes, I recommend the 14-inch-by-17-inch one (\$24.99 at containerstore.com).

7. If you or your child is visually stimulated, you may want to buy a Mighty Magnetic Strip to hang important papers or schedules.

With 12 colors from which to choose, you can use a different color for each family member (about \$13 at containerstore.com).

8. When it comes to making a quick lunch, prepare what you can the evening before.

Keep lunch-making items such as sacks, baggies, change, containers and grab-and-go foods in a place that allows you to quickly toss lunch together.

9. Make sure your child knows where to find supplies for doing homework.

I have heard stories from adults who were challenged as a child trying to do homework because they could never find the scissors, tape, glue, pencils, crayons, etc., that were needed to get assignments done.

The "Stuff" bucket from organize.com may be the perfect solution for children of all ages. It's great for school supplies, bath supplies or even makeup.

10. Buy a copy of the Captio AppliCase.

The years will pass quickly, and before you know it; your child will be heading off to college. The secret to getting in may be getting organized.

The AppliCase is your complete guide to the application process and has everything you need to stay on track and never miss a deadline. The AppliCase is packed with folders, forms, checklists and resources, as well as a built-in in box to catch incoming papers (\$29.95 at eliminatechaos.com).

Laura Leist, a certified professional organizer, is the founder and owner of eliminatechaos.com. She can be reached by e-mail at laura@eliminatechaos.com.