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Kids And Clutter; Sort Out That Mess!

By Gail Miller

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Are your kids' rooms so messy that sorting things out seems just too daunting a task? If so, here are some strategies for you to bring some order back to your children's spaces.

First if all, do your kids actually need everything they own? Are you still hoarding clothes and shoes they have grown out of or toys that are now far too young for them to play with? Be ruthless – pass them onto someone else, dump them at the charity shop or throw them out. It is not use trying to tidy around things which have outgrown their usefulness.

If any of your kids' rooms are particularly bad (drawers full of small pieces of rubbish, sweet wrappers, broken Lego, pens without tops etc, try the 'mining' technique. Take the draw (crate, box or bag) and tip everything out onto some large sheets of newspaper. Then 'mine' all the useful items and put them in a container. Everything that is left stays on the newspaper. This is then wrapped up and put straight into the bin.

Is there usually dirty washing in your kid's rooms? Are they loath to use the wash bin to put their soiled clothing in? If so, why not have a different coloured laundry bin for each child, or put a logo of their favourite character or pastime on the front. This might encourage them to place their dirty clothes where they belong.

Attach pegs or hooks behind each child's door. This is where they can hang their school uniform for the next day

as I think that trying to get them to fold their uniforms neatly and place them in a drawer till the next day would be a triumph of hope over experience! This way, when they come home at night, when they change they can simply place all items on the hooks and forget about them till the next morning.

Now, one of the best organising solutions is smart, cheap and effective. Buy a number of colourful plastic stackable crates to house clutter. They can be colour-coded if desired e.g. Blue for books, Red for Lego and construction, Yellow for games etc. Not only this, but they can be used for shoes or

seasonal clothing which is not required. If you are able to install some racking too these crates look very funky lined up against a wall and this way they don't have to be stacked on top of one another.

Books look much neater if lined up in size order or colour coded. A mish mash of books just stuffed in a bookshelf any old how does not make for a tidy looking room. Likewise with videos, or CDs. Store them with all red, green, yellow coloured spines together. Not only does it look neater, but it also makes titles easier to find too.

Should the rooms get to such a state that drastic measures are needed, try a '2 minute pick up' where you get the kids to pick up as much rubbish and put it back neatly as they can do in 2 minutes. This is an effective strategy, especially with younger kids, because it is so much fun! Let them off after 2 minutes if they have at least tried. You can do the rest as a favour.

If any of your children have a particularly small bedroom raise the bed on stilts. This way you will have all that extra room underneath. It doesn't need a DIY genius to rig some leg. If you can afford the money, one of those high beds with cupboards / sofas / writing desk contraptions underneath might just be a solution to a too cluttered bedroom.

Small toys such as Barbies, Duplo bricks, etc can be stored in drawstring bags hung from hooks on the wall. These are very simple to make. Just an oblong piece of material, folded in half and sewn up the seam and across the bottom with a hem round the top through which a string can be threaded. The bag can be

pulled tight shut with the string.

Finally, try to encourage good habits by letting your children help you with your own chores and always reward for a job well done. If your kids have at least tried to keep things tidy, you should let them know how you have noticed this with a reward and encouragement to do it again the next time.

~~~~~Mum of two, Gail Miller, is a UK artist and writer. View her vibrant, contemporary artwork at her website, Gails Art Gallery  
<http://home.freeuk.net/gails-gallery>~~~~~

## **Organize for Creativity**

**By Kathleen Wilson**

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OK, well, I know organization isn't really decorating, now is it? But, let's face it, what good is all the effort to create a nice home when it's hidden behind the mess and the clutter? So in order to help us all prevail over the chaos, here are some great hints for putting everything in its place! (On a budget, of course!)

The number one way to reduce clutter and mess? Deal with things as they occur, don't save it for later! File the mail (or throw it away) as soon as it comes out of the mailbox! Don't step over a small mess thinking you'll do the whole room later. Get the idea?

File your paperwork. Make a file/correspondence box with file folders. I just covered a sturdy cardboard box with some contact paper, turned it on its side, and glued a piece of miniature picket fence (cut out of leftover foam core) onto the front to hold in the bills! You could save

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lightweight cardboard for dividers, make a "to pay" file  
file  
and a "to keep" file, and perhaps a school file for the kids, and whatever else fits your household!

Hide stuff! Yes, there are times when we don't want our living room to look like Disneyland! Floor length cloths  
cloths  
on the end tables are a great place to shove a toy box or unusually shaped toys when not needed. If you have open  
open  
shelving or a pantry area, consider sewing a gathered curtain  
curtain

panel to cover clutter. Install it with a spring-tension  
spring-tension  
curtain rod, tie it on with ribbon, or try my favorite, velcro stick-on tabs!

Organize your kitchen logically, and not only will you reduce clutter, you'll save time and energy! Place items  
items  
in cupboards near the area where you normally use them. For instance, spices near the stove, everyday dishes near  
near  
the dishwasher, cutting board and knives near the sink – you get the idea! Use small boxes turned upside-down to make higher "shelves" in the back of your spice cabinet.

You don't have to buy expensive storage cubes for your kids' rooms! Covered boxes, sewn drawstring bags from extra  
extra  
material, even an old suitcase under the bed make good storage. A wall of simple metal-strip utility shelving (they sell it in white, as well) can accommodate a large  
large  
amount of stuff, especially for the older kids, and is relatively cheap at home improvement stores. I save old baby-wipe containers to store crayons, hot wheels, and that endless supply of useless toys from the fast food joints! You can cover them with contact paper. Try labeling  
labeling  
what goes where, even for the older kids, so there is

no  
arguing about what "putting it away" really means!

Finally, attack one area at a time. Try to fit in a  
little  
re-organizing each day, and you'll be recognizing that  
creative décor you lost in the clutter again soon!

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Kathleen Wilson is the author of "Quick Decorating Ideas Under \$20: The Budget Decorator's Bible"  
and the editor of The Budget Decorator, a free ezine dedicated to the "budget impaired" home  
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