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Organizational Tips: Help! My Home is Overflowing with School!

by Jerri Mayer, Oak Meadow parent

Whether you're just starting out or have been on the homeschooling journey for years, organizing your homeschooling routine can seem like an immense undertaking. The key to any successful organizational system is to keep it simple and make it part of your normal daily routine. The first year that I homeschooled my son Matt, I worked hard to make sure that homeschooling didn't throw our entire household into chaos. By the time his little brother Mason was ready for school, I had gotten a whole lot better at it.

Here are some of the lessons I've learned. Hopefully these simple suggestions can help you get organized, too.

Divide and Conquer: Divide up school supplies into individual bins. Inexpensive, plastic containers with lids can be purchased from any discount store. Label the bins according to their content and keep them where they are easily accessible. This will help you save valuable time and energy looking for needed materials.

School is in Session: Implement a school schedule and daily routine for your child. Displaying a large calendar in your home, marked with school times/days, activities and field trips, allows students to better grasp their homeschooling schedule up to a month at a time.

My Space: Whether your family prefers working in a formal classroom setting, at the kitchen table or a picnic table, it is important to create a proper workspace for your child. Remove any items that you feel could cause distractions that would negatively impact the learning process.

Lesson Planning 101: Set aside an hour each weekend to prepare for the following week's lessons. Daily work bins or file folders can save you time and frustration! Many homeschooling families with multiple children prefer to pre-fill individual work bins for each day of the upcoming week. This system gives students the ability to work independently and visually comprehend their daily work load. It also allows the parent the freedom to move from child to child answering questions or assisting with more challenging tasks.

Main Lesson Books: The sky's the limit on ways to document your child's work. Many veteran homeschoolers believe the Main Lesson Book concept is the easiest, best organized, and most memorable way to organize your child's school work. I agree! By the end of the school year, your child has created a beautiful scrapbook filled with all his hard work. Premade Main Lesson Books can be purchased directly from the Oak Meadow Bookstore or you can create your own MLB by simply hole-punching the school work, binding it together with string, and adding a sturdy cover.

Shutterfly: Hands down, my favorite homeschool aid is Shutterfly.com! All you need is one hour a week, a digital camera, and a desire to brag about your homeschooler. Throughout the week, I snap little pictures of the boys working on everything from science or history projects to painting wonderful works of art. Then on Sunday, I upload these pictures directly onto my Shutterfly account. Once uploaded, these items can be posted to your personal share site, photo album, or memory book, and can be made accessible to your Oak Meadow teacher. With her access, she can view and comment on the posted pictures, videos and school work.

With Shutterfly, you also have the ability to create personalized yearbooks for your children. Simply drop and click your photos into the website's "Memory Book" feature. By the end of the year, each child has a personal yearbook filled with all their school activities and accomplishments. Blank pages are left for signatures and well wishes from friends and family. For less than an hour, once a week, you have created a fantastic, professionally bound record of your child's school year. Plus, you have made a beautiful yearbook that will be enjoyed for many years to come.

Communication: If you're a family that has chosen enrollment in Oak Meadow School as we have, I would encourage you to take full advantage of the knowledge and experience of your child's Oak Meadow teacher. Your entire learning experience becomes easier and more productive the more the parents and teacher communicate. Mark your calendar as a reminder of when to submit work to your teacher, and don't hesitate to email or call when you have questions. Regular communication will help your teacher better assist you in tailoring the material to your child's needs.

Listening to your family's needs and daily rhythms can help you put in place an organizational system that will work best for you and assist you in reaching your homeschooling goals. Just as importantly, it will help you achieve peace of mind! Hopefully these ideas will give you a starting point for getting your home ready for the upcoming school year. Staying organized will return benefits that the entire family will enjoy.