

10 Ways to Get Your ADHD Child Organized

Organization help to transform even the messiest children with ADHD into neatniks — and help prepare them for life on their own.

by the ADDitude Editors

Kid-Friendly Organization

Do you forget the color of the carpet in your child's room? Does his backpack look like a tornado turned it upside down? Disorganization is a common ADHD trait. The good news is there are ways to get your child more organized. Here are our best kid-friendly clutter-control tips!

Use Visual Cues

Many children with ADHD are visual processors. For school binders, papers, and notebooks, consider color-coding with a different color for each subject. Trying using one color for homework, and another color for papers that stay home. Around the house, use open shelving or clear containers with labels to keep rooms tidy. Clear-plastic, over-the-door shoe holders are a great place to keep small items that are easily lost.

Show — Don't Just Tell

ADHD is passed down in families, so there's a good chance you or your partner has ADHD and is just as disorganized. It is hard to teach organization skills if you don't have them yourself. If that's the case, working hard to set up organizational systems in your house will benefit everyone, not just your child. When your child sees that organization is important to you, it reinforces why it should be important to him.

Ask for Your Child's Input

When creating organizational systems for your home, ask for your child's input. When he is involved in structuring the routines, he has more of a stake in the outcome and may be more likely to follow the routine. If the system isn't working, bring your child into the discussion to find out what you can change to make it more effective.

Simplify and Declutter

If you are like most people, you have a lot more "stuff" than you use. Simplify and declutter your home, so it is easier to keep it neat. Keep five toys out and pack the rest in a box; every few weeks, rotate the toys. If your child "needs" a toy from the box, let him know he must put one away. Go through your child's room and do the same with books and clothes. The less he needs to put away, the tidier the room stays.

Hang Up a Laminated List

"Clean up your room" means different things to different people. You may mean make the bed, pick up the toys, put dirty clothes in the hamper, and so on — but to your child, it may mean throw everything under the bed. Be clear about what you expect. Make a checklist of tasks, laminate it, and tack it up on the back of your child's bedroom door. When you say, "Clean up your room," he can follow the checklist and mark off each item as it is completed.

Ease the Morning Rush

Getting out the door in the morning is much easier if everything your child needs is in one place. Place a shelf or basket by the front door designated for school items. The night before, when homework is completed, all school items go right into the backpack and/or the basket. Deposit any extra papers, lunch, sport clothes, equipment, or miscellaneous items for school in the basket. Your child knows he has everything he needs when the basket is empty.

Practice Backpack Hygiene

Referred to as "black holes," backpacks are a gathering place for every piece of paper your child touches each day. Make backpack organization a part of daily homework. Before your child begins homework each evening, take the first two minutes to clean papers out of his backpack and organize them into folders. Bonus: This simple habit helps students transition into doing homework.

Think In the Box

"I can't do my homework because I can't find a pencil." Have you heard that before? Homework time goes much smoother when school supplies are easily accessible. Use an old shoebox to create a homework supply box with pencils, pens, crayons, paper, a ruler, glue sticks, a calculator, and any other items your child regularly needs. Once homework is completed, all supplies go right back into the box.

Work on Timing Tasks

Children with ADHD find it hard to estimate how long a task will take. Your child may think that washing the dishes will take five minutes, but you know, it probably will take 20. When starting a new routine, have your child use a kitchen timer or a stopwatch to time how long each step takes.

Try these apps for some high-tech help.

Praise Effort, Not Results

Focus on what your child is doing right. If he attempted to organize his backpack, let him know you appreciate the effort. If he went through the checklist to clean his room but forgot one step, praise him for sticking with it and completing most of the tasks. Experts suggest that parents give five positive statements for every negative, disapproving one.

Further Information

ADDitude magazine has tons of great information to help you organize your child:

1. Get Organized for Better Learning
2. Your Cure for Overdue Books, Library Late Fees, and ADHD (OK, 2 Out of 3)
3. Top 10 Routine Builders: Organization Help for ADHD Children
4. End Household Clutter: ADHD Organization Help for Kids
5. Raising an Organized ADHD/LD Child Parenting Center

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