

WHAT IS HOW TO ORGANIZE MY STUFF?

- ▶ How to Organize My Stuff is a set of strategies to help your child arrange their belongings and environment in an orderly way. This can help them do everyday things more easily like keep their room clean, organize their backpack or desk, and keep track of their homework assignments and school papers.
- ▶ By practicing this skill, your child will get better at staying organized in their daily life and spend less time looking for things or playing "catch up". Being organized can help your child do better at school and home and feel good about themself.



HERE'S HOW TO ORGANIZE YOUR STUFF

You can introduce this skill by saying, "We are going to try a new way to help you organize your stuff. Let's read through this list of strategies together and pick a few for you to try." Go through the ideas below to help your child get more organized. Depending on your child's age, some strategies may work better than others.

1

Give everything a home.

If you find that your room or belongings are usually messy or your things end up in piles, give each item a specific storage spot or "home" (e.g., clothes in closet or dresser, toys on shelf, backpack on hook). Use organizational tools if you can, such as boxes/bins, drawers, files, trays, or shelves. If possible, label your spaces so you remember where things go (e.g., drawer labeled "school supplies"). After you use an object, put it back in its "home" so you don't create clutter.

Example: When she gets home from school, Annie puts her shoes and coat in the hallway closet and her lunch bag on the kitchen counter. Before bed, she places her backpack by the front door so she remembers to take it to school.

2

Use a planner or agenda.

If you forget what homework you have or tend to turn assignments in late, using a planner can help. Keep track of important dates, homework assignments, social events, and extracurricular activities by writing them down in one place.

Example: At the end of each class, Jacob writes his homework assignment and its due date down in his planner.

3

Try color-coding.

If it's hard to distinguish between different groups of belongings, try sorting them by color. You can use different color notebooks and folders for each subject, or write assignments for each subject in a different color pen.

Example: Sophia always puts new/unfinished homework assignments in her red folder, completed homework in her blue folder, and papers for her parents in her green folder.

4

Set a deadline for getting tasks done.

If tasks often feel rushed or “last minute”, set deadlines to reduce your stress. You can use due dates (e.g., school assignment due on Monday), a deadline you or your parents choose (e.g., clean room by dinnertime), or blocks of time (e.g., do task A for 20 minutes, then move on to task B for 10 minutes). Being creative can help: for instance, try putting away as many clothes as you can before 3 songs are over.

Example: Jeff set a timer for 15 minutes, then put away as many of his toys as he could before the timer buzzed. He took a 5-minute break, then used the same strategy to sort his art supplies for another 15 minutes.

5

Schedule “clean up time”.

If your backpack, desk, or locker are often full and it’s hard to find what you need, work with your parents and teachers to set regular times to clean out those spaces so they don’t get too cluttered or

Example: Every Friday, Kiera’s teacher spends a few minutes helping her clear out her desk by throwing away unnecessary papers and trash. Every Sunday, her parents help her clean out her backpack to get ready for the next week.

6

Ask your parents or teachers to support you.

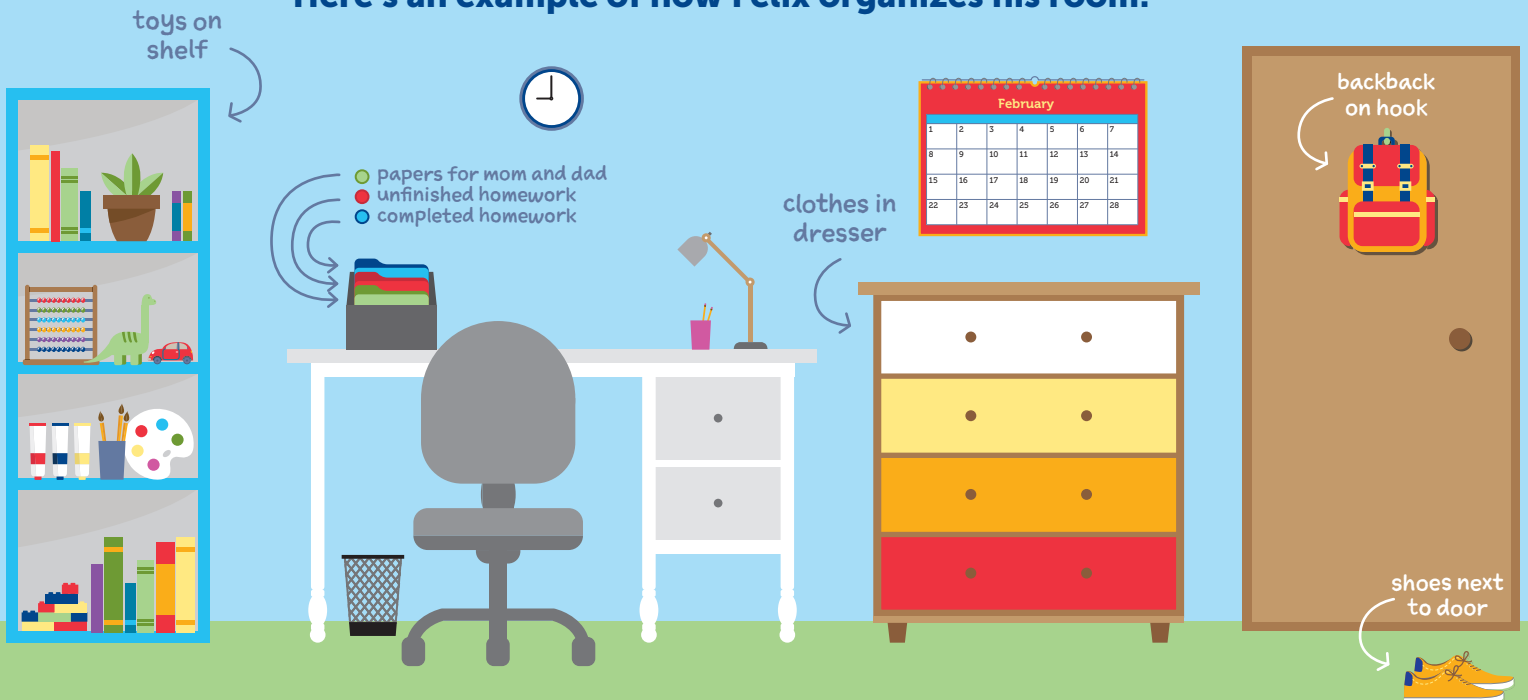
When first trying these strategies, share them with your parent and teacher so they can help you practice. For example, a parent can go through your backpack with you and check that everything you need is in there (and also help you clear out whatever you no longer need!). Similarly, your teacher can remind you to write assignments in your planner, check that you wrote them down correctly, and ensure that you are taking home everything you need that day. Your parents and teachers can also give you suggestions for new strategies, help you improve ones that aren’t working, and support you in becoming more independent.

7

Reward yourself.

If you’re working hard to stay organized, choose how you will treat yourself. If you’re not sure what is allowed or appropriate, ask your parents. Be sure to give yourself a pat on the back for working hard and doing more on your own!

Here’s an example of how Felix organizes his room:



PARENT HANDOUT: HOW TO ORGANIZE MY STUFF TIPS



ADHD Skill 7

HOW CAN ORGANIZING MY STUFF HELP MY FAMILY?

- ▶ When your child has ADHD, it can be harder to stay organized. For instance, your child may have a messy bedroom, lose track of assignments or belongings, or forget to bring home important papers. You may find that there are piles of clothes around their room, their backpack is full of papers, or it's hard for them to find a pen or notebook to use in class.
- ▶ This can mean they take a long time to complete easy tasks, or it is challenging to do the things they need to do, like homework or chores. Your child, your family, and/or your child's teachers may find this frustrating or annoying.
- ▶ How to Organize My Stuff gives your child helpful strategies to improve their organization. By practicing this skill, your child can establish better routines and feel successful at home and school.

COMMON PARENT CONCERNS

Organizing is hard, and everything usually turns out okay in the end. They want to know why they should bother?

It can take hard work and time to become more organized. Encourage your child to think about their goals and how disorganization may make it harder to achieve them. For example, do they wish they didn't lose as many papers or possessions? Would it feel good to turn things in on time? What would it be like to know where their things are when they need them? Is there any benefit to you nagging them less about their messy room or losing things? See if your child can identify whether there are advantages to trying a new strategy or two. Then see if these new strategies help them to do well and feel better!

My child starts to organize their stuff, and then they get distracted. It's hard for them to finish anything.

Think about when your child will best be able to try new organizational strategies. For example, pick a time of day when they have the most energy or focus. Try to limit their distractions by turning off the TV and putting away their phone. They can start with a smaller task, like cleaning out one drawer, one section of their backpack, or one side of their desk. Check in on them in case they need help, and encourage them to take breaks as needed so they don't get overwhelmed. You and your child's teachers can offer more suggestions based on what you've seen work well for them at home or school.

When I ask my child to organize their things, they say it's too hard to do a big task like cleaning their room. It's so messy, they don't know where to start! When tackling a big task, help your child think of ways to break it down so it feels less overwhelming (see ADHD Skill 6 on How to Get Things Done for tips). For example, they can split their bedroom into four sections and clean one at a time. Once their room is clean, have them save a little time each day to straighten up. For example, each day they can spend five minutes putting things away, put away at least five things, or clean off one area, such as their nightstand. Remind them to reward themselves for their hard work!

These strategies sound helpful, but it's hard to know which ones my child should use.

Learning new skills can be challenging for any child! Remember they don't need to do all of these at once. Your child can start by trying one of these strategies and seeing how it goes. If possible, you or your child's teachers can try the new skills out with them the first few times. Kindly offer helpful ideas about which techniques are best for your child and ways to improve their process.

If your child's difficulty with organization gets in the way at school, home, or with friends, they may need additional support. Check in with your primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help.