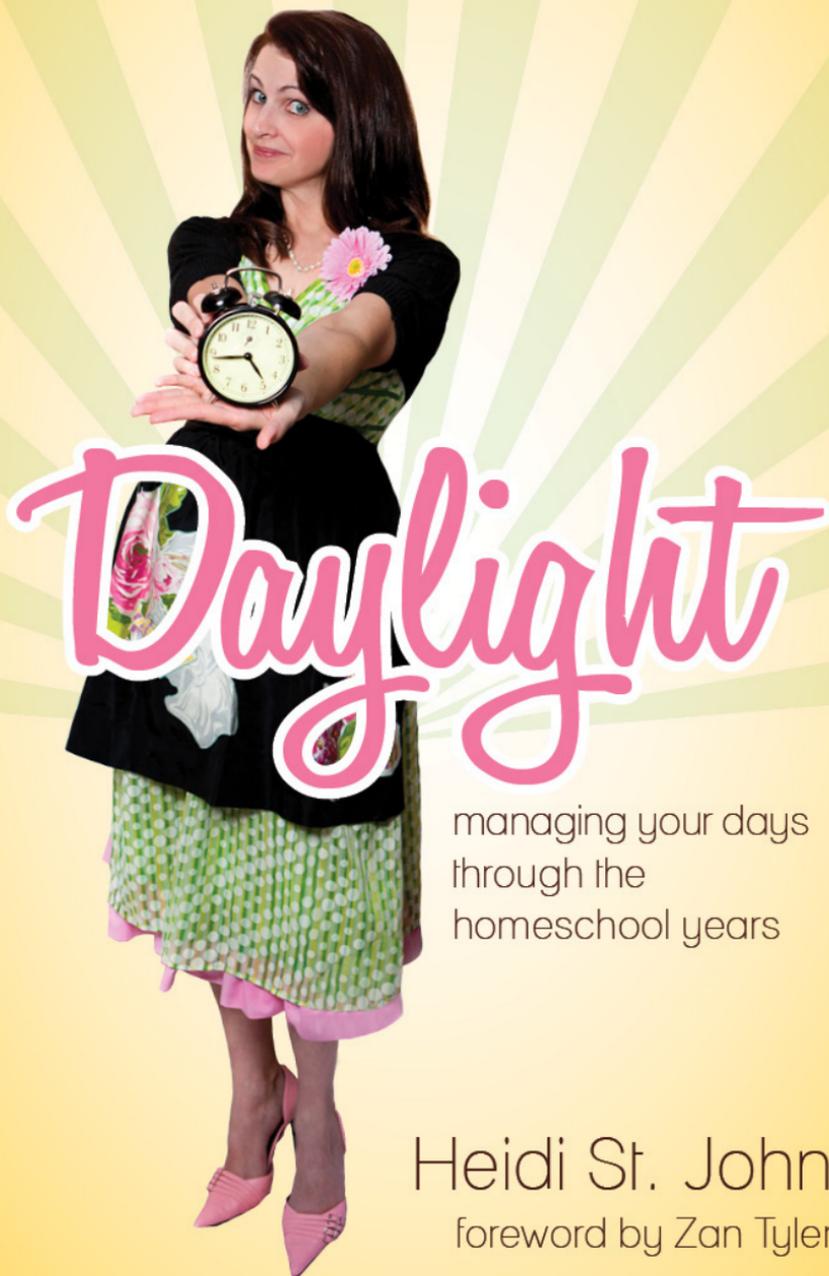


The Busy Homeschool Mom's Guide to...

Sample Chapter



Daylight

managing your days
through the
homeschool years

Heidi St. John
foreword by Zan Tyler

The Busy Homeschool Mom's Guide™
to
Daylight

Other Books By Heidi St. John

The Busy Homeschool Mom's Guide to Romance

Nurturing Your Marriage Through the Homeschool Years

Words Along the Way - A Busy Mom's Journal

What I love about Heidi St. John is she is transparent, relatable and hilarious to boot. Trust me, she's been reading your mail, and you'll be glad she did. Heidi understands the challenges facing the Christian woman who is a wife, mother and homeschooler. And she doesn't lower the bar for us in anyway; but lifts up our eyes to the One who is our help. This is how to be God-empowered and God-graced in your ministry to your family. Heidi St. John's *Guide to Daylight* will pull up the blinds in the darkest corners of your harried, frazzled life and let the Son shine in.

Debra Bell, AUTHOR

*THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO HOMESCHOOLING
AND THE ULTIMATE HOMESCHOOL PLANNING SYSTEM*

Heidi St John's newest book, *The Busy Homeschool Mom's Guide to Daylight*, offers renewed hope for busy moms who may sometimes be overwhelmed with all that needs to be done every day. Honest, funny, candid and poignant, Heidi's writing always hits home with a helping hand from someone who has already been there and learned the ins and outs.

Jane Claire Lambert, AUTHOR

FIVE IN A ROW

Heidi St. John knows how to meet you where you live – in your kitchen, in the car, even in your closet. It’s clear that Heidi has a plan for when things don’t go as planned. She teaches us how to be adaptable, how to solve problems, how to laugh at ourselves, and how to get the most out of our homeschool experience. Best of all, Heidi gently reminds us not to feel inadequate when other moms seem to have it all together. You will be a more confident homeschool mom after you read this book.

Elizabeth Smith, SPEAKER
WIFE OF HSLDA PRESIDENT MIKE SMITH

Here it is! A realistic, doable, self-effacing solution to the ‘I am not organized enough to homeschool’ excuse. If organization has delayed take off on your homeschool adventure, buckle your seat belt. You have been cleared for departure!

Rachael Carman, AUTHOR
HOW TO HAVE A H.E.A.R.T. FOR YOUR KIDS

Managing your day is important, but you won’t succeed unless able to manage yourself, first. You can do it. Stick around—Heidi will take you by the hand and lead you down a quiet journey of peaceful transformation as you lean on the Master Manager Himself.

Gena Suarez, PUBLISHER
THE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE® MAGAZINE

The Busy Homeschool Mom's Guide™ to

Daylight

Managing Your Days

Through the Homeschool Years

Heidi St. John

Real Life



P R E S S

The Busy Homeschool Mom's Guide™to Daylight:
Managing Your Days Through the Homeschool Years

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To every busy homeschool mom who has ever been mistaken for a person with supernatural patience or who wanted to call a substitute teacher for the day:

You deserve much affirmation for the immeasurable investment you are making each day as a wife, mother and teacher. You are shaping history while you teach it.

I hope this book encourages you to wisely use every precious moment of daylight you have been given to influence and nurture your children in the ways of the Lord.

The homeschool years go by so fast—

Enjoy them!

CHAPTER 2

Organized Daylight

CONTROLLING CLUTTER AND RECLAIMING YOUR SPACE

*Don't own so much clutter
that you will be relieved to see your house catch fire.
~ Wendell Berry*

One roadblock to developing a POA for your day may easily be your lack of organization. It's difficult to create a successful rhythm to your day if you are surrounded by another set of not-so-wonderful twins I like to call Chaos and Clutter. Left unmanaged, these brats will drain you of your time and energy. They are the nemesis of every busy homeschool mom. Along with their cousin, Excess, they are the enemy of a peaceful, organized home.

Did you know that there is an emotional cost to the things that you own? We live in a culture of excess. Most of the time, we think of clutter as taking physical space but it costs

emotionally as well as financially. Clutter and disorganization in our homes can rob us of peace and restfulness at home, leading to feelings of frustration and anxiety. How many of you reading this book have said, “Darling, please go get your math book,” only to spend the next two hours turning the house upside down looking for it?

Me too!

It’s easy to see how too much clutter and too many piles of unfinished business at home cause us to feel overwhelmed and discouraged with life.

Many moms would rather ignore the mess and try instead to simply work around it, but I promise you that getting a grip on your stuff will translate into more hours in your day! If that sounds appealing to you, then get ready to purge and simplify.

You probably don’t need all that stuff you have. And besides ...

You Can’t Take it With You

Learning to control physical clutter is an absolutely essential skill if you want to manage your day well. I learned this early on in life from my grandparents.

My grandmother on my father’s side was a packrat. Now, don’t get me wrong—I loved her dearly. She sewed the most

amazing things and she made the best fudge I have ever eaten in my life. The only problem was that it was nearly impossible to find our way to the kitchen to eat it! She literally had to create paths through dozens of boxes and clutter so that we could find our way there.

As much as I loved my grandma, it was stressful to be at her home for too long. Piles of unorganized paperwork, laundry, groceries and garage sale items covered every flat surface in her little apartment. It was frustrating for her, too, because finding her car keys in under an hour was nearly impossible. Grandma had a clutter problem.

Grandma knew that one of the secrets to a quiet, contented household was simple organization.

Grandma Forsberg was the complete opposite. My mother's mother, she was neat almost to a fault (which is why finding a balance is so important)! To Grandma Forsberg, cleanliness was next to godliness. Grandma knew that one of the secrets to a quiet, contented household was simple organization. She had a place for everything—and at the end of the day, everything was in its place.

This attitude was adopted into my mom's household, too, and it helped me tremendously when I became a wife and

mother. Mom taught us to keep our rooms clean and to clean up after ourselves as we were growing up. Having a place for everything kept our home neat and tidy, even though there were nine people there most of the time!

Chaos and clutter actually impede our ability to live freely and peacefully, because physical clutter eventually results in mental clutter. There is something deeply satisfying about simplifying life. We can simplify our things, our schedules and our homeschooling. I like to start with physical clutter though, because clearing the clutter at home frees us in so many more ways than just physical space. It brings emotional freedom as well.

Are you ready to simplify and de-clutter your home? Before you can organize, you've got to prioritize. You've got to get rid of excess. We were created by a God of order—so it makes sense that we function better when there is order in our homes.

Clutter's Last Stand

clut·ter/'klətər/

Verb: Crowd (something) untidily; fill with clutter.

Noun: A collection of things lying about in an untidy mess.

Have you ever felt stressed out by all the stuff around you? Many families today struggle with clearing the clutter out of their homes. Homeschool moms are no different except that we've got even more things to sort through! Sometimes, it's difficult to know what to keep and what to toss.

Sometimes we keep things for sentimental reasons. Other times, we keep unused items we don't really need just in case we have the opportunity to use them later. I have been guilty of all of these kinds of excuses to keep clutter around at various points in my adult life.

For example, a friend gave me her expensive juicer several years ago. She didn't use it anymore, and thought I might enjoy it since I love to make green smoothies for our kids. Even though I wasn't sure I needed the juicer, I was too afraid to hurt her feelings and turn down such an expensive gift. She brought it over and I put it on our kitchen counter.

That huge juicer sat on my kitchen counter—unused—for about six months. I kept telling myself I would use it but, for whatever reason, I never found the motivation to add that appliance to my daily routine. When I finally accepted that I wasn't going to use it regularly, I moved it to our garage where it collected dust for three years!

We moved that heavy thing from one shelf to the next, trying to make room for even more things we didn't use until one day ... I'd had enough. I snapped. There was so much stuff in my garage that I didn't know where to begin cleaning it up. I didn't even have the emotional or physical energy to hold a garage sale and I ended up giving about \$1,500 worth of stuff away on Craigslist to the first sucker person who claimed it. Jay and I stood by the curb and watched as people from all over town came and claimed our things. It was a weird feeling to see things that had been in our home for years leave with strangers but, since I was so ready to part with them, it was easier than I thought it would be. "Buh-bye, stuff! So long, Chaos, Clutter and Excess!"

An Emotional Drain

It was so freeing to see things that we were not using leave in someone else's car! So freeing, in fact, that I began to go through our whole house and get rid of even more things that we no longer used or needed, many of them duplicate items.

The more we purged, the better I felt.

Here's the thing: I had not realized how much emotional energy I was putting in to finding a place for all the things

that were constantly coming into our home. Letting go of things I had been hanging onto but did not need or love was freeing. Having less clutter around made our home feel more peaceful and less stressful, even though we lived in a modest-sized house with six children. After the garage was organized, I headed to the kitchen. I got rid of extra can openers, bowls I never used, knives I didn't need, and little gadgets (some of them still in their store packaging). The extra coffee maker I kept "just in case" ours broke and the cookie press that looked cool but I had used only once in 15 years went too. It wasn't all junk, either. Wonderful things we purchased or received as gifts over the years but never got around to using were put into boxes and donated to a local thrift shop.

Voila! More space in the kitchen cupboards meant more space on the kitchen counter tops. Our kitchen felt more spacious and inviting. I found I had room to display beloved photographs and other things that made us smile.

As the children saw me cleaning out kitchen cupboards and cleaning off bookshelves, they began to catch a vision for what I was doing. Pretty soon, they were motivated to clear out their toys, closets and even their dressers! We made dozens of trips to a charity drop off site over the summer as we purged

and organized our home.

The result was more room for the kids to run, less stuff to worry about, less stuff to dust (amen!) and more room in my mind to think about other things. (Scary, I know.) It was wonderful.

Now before you think our home is neat and clutter free all the time, or that I was able to do this overnight, let me be very clear: It took us a long time to clear the clutter from our home. To be honest, we still have to keep an eye on it. Just last week I was helping two of our younger daughters (elementary school age) clean their room. I was amazed at how much stuff was lurking under the bed, behind closet doors, and stuffed into dressers. Birthday party favors, stained clothes, unmatched socks. That's just the way it goes.

But if you stay on top of it, it's easier to tame.

Help Your Children Hold Loosely

Moms, you are training your kids in so much more than academics. You're teaching them life skills. As your children see you placing importance in keeping clutter to a minimum and holding loosely to things, they will have a model to take into adulthood as well.

I've tried to create a process for getting rid of things in our house that is easy for the kids to follow. We keep a large plastic bin at the top of the stairs to be filled regularly by every member of our family. Toys that they have outgrown or no longer enjoy, clothes that don't fit or that we simply don't need, extra blankets, lamps, you name it—if we don't need it, it goes in the bin.

When the bin is full, I put those things into a bag and they are donated to a thrift store or given to a friend who I know could use them. The point is, we don't keep things that are in the bin.

Giving these things away is not only good for you, it's good for your kids. It's a skill they will need and use for the rest of their lives!

Defining Clutter

You may be looking around you wondering how to dig out from under the excess and clutter in your home. If so, you're not alone! If you're wondering what defines clutter, allow me to provide you with a brief explanation of how we determine what clutter is in our home. This will help you start to recognize what you can keep and what you need to get rid of.

• **Clutter is anything that is disorganized.**

In our home, everything has a place. That's not to say everything is always in its place but at the end of the day, we know where things go. We know it's cluttered when things have strayed from their home and got mixed up with everything else. Toys left on the floor. Mail sitting on the entryway table or kitchen counter. Shoes in the toy box (it happens all the time) in the hallway or by the front door. Clothes that need to be put away. Schoolwork piled up on the kitchen table. I could go on and on. Essentially, anything that is disorganized or untidy is clutter.

• **Clutter is anything you don't need or love.**

This is a big one. This is the question I had to ask when I did my first big cleanup. Training the kids to ask this question has helped them to define what they really want to keep as opposed to what they feel they might want later. It has also helped us to define what we truly value in life. When a home is filled with things we love, rather than things we are just keeping around for a rainy day, it helps us to truly love where we live.

- **Clutter is too much stuff in too small a space.**

This is often a busy homeschool mom's struggle. Books that take up too much space on a shelf. A schoolroom that is so overfilled no one uses it. Too many papers in a box on the desk. Too many clothes in one drawer. Too many items on the bathroom counter or too much furniture in one room. No matter how creative your storage solutions are—too many bins are still too many.

Mostly though, clutter is just *too much* stuff. I really believe it frees us mentally and emotionally when we scale down. It's amazing how freeing it is to come home to a clean, uncluttered house at the end of the day, or to wake up to a tidy kitchen in the morning. I don't know about you, but looking at clean bookshelves and a tidy school area makes me feel like I've got a better grip on homeschooling.

Where Do I Start? Use Zones!

People ask us all the time how we keep our house tidy and neat. Let me just say this right up front: our house is NOT always neat and tidy. We usually start our days off with a clean

and tidy house but within an hour or two it seriously looks like a bomb has gone off in several areas.

Over the years, I've discovered that the key to living peacefully with a houseful of kids is to have a plan to keep order rather than an expectation that the house should look like a show home from *Better Homes and Gardens* all the time!

We have tried different methods for keeping up with housework during different seasons of life in our family. When all the children were very young, a schedule taped to the refrigerator door helped a lot. On it, we had areas of our home divided into zones. Each child was assigned one of these zones.

A zone might be the hallway and guest bathroom, the entry way or kitchen. Even little ones can have their own zone: our three year old loved tidying her zone ... it was her toy box!

Mornings and afternoons are great times to train the kids to tidy up the house. When Jay was working outside of our home, we tried to have the house neat and welcoming for him when he arrived home from work. There is something really wonderful about coming home to a clean, tidy house and zones really work.

The best thing about zones though, is that you can use them to tidy up for company in no time flat! This is because

you're not trying to figure out which parts of the house need attention: everyone just tidies up his or her zone.

DAILY CHORES & ZONES

12th Grader	11th Grader	9th Grader	5th Grader	3rd Grader	1st Grader
Your zone is what you check before you go to bed each night. Please keep it clean, it's your responsibility.					
Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5	Zone 6
Up Bath.	Family Rm.	Garage	Trashman!	Entry Way	Coat Closet
Living Rm.	Guest Bath	Recycling	TV Room	School Room	Toybox
Up Hall	Office	Stairs		Laundry	Bedroom
Bedroom	Bedroom	Bedroom		Bedroom	
M-Breakfast	M-Laundry	M-Vacuum	M-Vacuum	M-Dinner	M-Breakfast
T-Dinner	T-Breakfast	T-Garbage	T-Dinner	T-Laundry	T-Dinner
W-Tutor Day	W-Vacuum	W-Laundry	W-Breakfast	W-Kitchen	W-Toilets
Th-Vacuum	Th-Dinner	Th-Breakfast	Th-Laundry	Th-Dust FR	Th-Mirrors
F-Laundry	F-Dust LR	F-Dinner	F-Dust LR	F-Breakfast	F-Laundry
Breakfast is helping grandma. Dinner means you help with dinner cleanup and prep. Laundry means running laundry through. Every person folds and puts away their own clothes. If it's your day, that includes the baby's clothes.					
Each Morning:	Do what is listed for that day after you've had breakfast and gotten schoolwork out.				
Every Afternoon:	Quick zone check.				
Every Evening:	Finish your day's chore and check your zone.				

One Thing at A Time

When your home is filled with clutter, trying to tackle a mountain of stuff can be quite overwhelming. It's easy to get discouraged by a task that seems insurmountable when you're trying to raise a family and homeschool at the same time!

So here's my advice: start with just fifteen minutes at

a time. You can do just about anything in fifteen minutes a day! Here are some great ways to get started, fifteen minutes at a time.



Create a place for incoming papers. I'm not just talking about mail, either. I'm talking about all paper that you need to sort. Receipts, prescriptions, schoolwork, letters. If it's junk mail, don't keep it another second. Toss it. This one simple step will save you hours of time organizing and will make a huge difference in simplifying your space.

Clear off a counter. It's amazing to me how quickly flat surfaces in our home fill up. Car keys, purses, bills, dishes, books, you name it. Eventually though, you want to get these clutter keeping spaces cleared out. Start with one counter. Clear off everything possible, leaving only the essentials. Put away everything you don't use all the time.



Take fifteen things out of your house...for good. Take a bag and start filling it. Most of us can quickly go into a bathroom, a closet or the kitchen and find fifteen things we no longer use or enjoy. As soon as you have

a minimum of fifteen things, take them out to your car. Keep them there so that when you're in town running errands, you can drop them off at a charity site.



Tidy one small area. It can be the entry-way, guest bathroom or dining room. Spend five minutes focused just on that one area.



Clean out your medicine cabinet. I did this a few years ago. To my amazement, I had medicine in there from when I was still single! Throw it out, Mom! Go through your cabinet and search for everything non-essential. Band-aids that look like they won't stick, old makeup, ointments that you have used once in five years—it all needs to go.



Write down what rooms need your attention first. If you can write them all down in order of priority, you can come up with a game plan to tackle the job.

Once you have written down which rooms need the most attention, choose one to start in. Just getting one room done will motivate you toward success and spur you on to your next room. It's a lot like being on a diet! Losing two pounds is good motivation to continue on and lose two more.

Start small. One step at a time! I'm going to start with a plan for organizing larger rooms. If you don't have a designated schoolroom, that's okay. You can use this as a template for many areas in your home: living or family room, dining room, bedroom. The method for organizing it is still the same.

Organizing Large Rooms

Here's the best way I have found to tackle larger rooms. As I thought about what works for keeping our busy house fairly organized, I realized that I can boil it down to five basic steps. Don't you love that? Keep it simple, busy homeschool mom!

If you have older children, train them to work alongside you and encourage them to offer their suggestions as you rearrange and organize. Some of our kids are really gifted in this area, and allowing them in on the process has not only trained them, it has been a huge blessing to me!

1. Before you start, set out four containers, either boxes or bags. One is for items you will keep, one for giveaway (whether you garage sale, donate, or whatever), one is for items you are not sure what to do with, and one is for trash.

2. Empty the room. I know this sounds crazy but if things have gotten out of hand, it's the best way to start. Empty the room as much as you possibly can—right down to the bookshelves. Empty them, too. Come to think of it, since the room is being emptied, it is a good time to rearrange the furniture if you like to do that sort of thing.
3. If your husband or older children are around, make it a family project. After all, it didn't get cluttered up by itself, and training your kids to part with clutter will help them tremendously later in life. Make sure everyone knows that the goal is to simplify, simplify, simplify! It's hard work, but it's worth it. When I am getting ready to organize things, I expect things to get worse before they get better, and I warn the family ahead of time—it could take a few days before we are finished.
4. Sort as you go. As you empty the room, start sorting. BE BRUTAL about what you decide to keep. Ask yourself, "Do I love this?" and if you don't answer yes immediately, it's time to get rid of it, or set it into a separate box to get back to. When

sorting curriculum, you may decide to store things for later use or set them aside for a used curriculum sale, *eBay*, etc. If that's the case, you still need to get that stuff out of the room. I like to have boxes ready to label for this purpose.

5. Be sure that as you put things into boxes you clearly label them so there is no guessing as to what is inside. I also set a box of curriculum aside to give to other homeschool moms. I might take it to our homeschool co-op or call a few moms to see if they are interested in going through it and taking what they would like.
6. Say goodbye. When the room is empty and everything has been sorted, it's time to take the giveaway/throwaway things out of your house.
7. Don't look back. Put them in your car.
8. I have a rule at home that when it goes in the giveaway bag, no one can sort through it and take things back out, because if we really needed it or loved it, it wouldn't be in the bag in the first place. Also, feel free to talk to your junk as you take it out to your car. Buh-bye, clutter! Good-

bye, pencil sharpener that I never liked and lamp that we never use. See ya, books that no one reads! Au revoir, scrapbook supplies from 1995 and the guilt that came with not using them! Nighty-night, picture frames that we never hung! Are you getting a good visual of what it looks like to declutter? I hope so! It really is freeing when you begin to let go of things—because then your things don't have a hold on you anymore.

9. Keep sorting, and take a deep breath, busy homeschool mom, 'cause you're going to feel a whole lot better when this is done!
10. Move Back In. Once you have taken all the giveaway and trash items out of your house, it's time for the really fun part—moving things back into the space you cleared out. I am a big fan of keeping beautiful baskets on shelves for organizing. We have baskets with scrap paper in them and baskets that are full of colored pencils. I believe that we even have a basket for storing extra baskets! Point is, EVERYTHING has a place. When you bring things back into the room, have a vision for how you want to display

what you keep. For an item to come back in the room, it should:

- ❖ Fit neatly into a designated space.
- ❖ Be something you truly love or use regularly.
- ❖ Not exceed a reasonable number of items. In other words, do you *really* need 200 pencils on the shelf? Probably not. Find a place for the extra pencils that is out of sight but easy to get to.

Creative Storage Ideas

Finding creative storage solutions is so easy these days! I love finding new ways to organize because it allows me to be creative and change with the landscape of our family. Being a mom of seven, I have had ample opportunity to try out many methods of organization over the years. Most of them work. When you look to organize your schoolroom, keep in mind that if you love the look, you will be more likely to keep it neat and tidy long term.

Keep your eyes open for creative containers to store things in. I have found some of my favorite containers at garage sales! When you are at second-hand stores, look for pretty baskets

that will hide some of the more “necessary” clutter, like scrap paper and art supplies. We have a shelf in our schoolroom that has four clear plastic containers neatly lined up together for crayons, colored pencils, erasers, and regular pencils. The best part about the clear plastic is that even little ones who cannot read can see where these things are supposed to go.

One more little note about containers: I forgo lids whenever possible. We lose them anyway. If I am storing away something that will not be used often, it has a lid. If I am simply trying to organize something on a shelf (like pencils or crayons), it does not.

Keeping School Records

Transcripts. Standardized tests. “Record of work done”. These words have struck fear into the heart of many a homeschool mom. The idea of keeping meticulous track of school assignments is daunting for a mom with one child, let alone four or more! As a new homeschooler, the idea of record keeping overwhelmed me. I did the best I could, storing the kids’ work in file folders

Make sure your children are in the habit of writing their name and the date on their schoolwork!

and dating worksheets so that I knew when we finished them, but my methods weren't exactly user-friendly and it certainly was not something I was excited about doing.

Like it or not, though, you need to keep records of your child's schoolwork. Clunky record keeping is not what you want.

In our home, we do quite a bit of notebooking, along with workbooks for math and (in the early years) phonics. The notebooks have become each child's record of written work—and we love them! But I will admit, making sure the right papers ended up in the right notebooks every day was challenging and frustrating at times.

So I simplified. Are you starting to see a pattern?

Today, we use a very simple method for keeping track of school papers and notebooking assignments. Instead of having the kids put their papers in the appropriate notebook at the end of the day, ALL of their assignments, love notes, darling drawings that I can't part with and artwork go in one box.

That's it! Each day, as the children finish their work, they know that they are supposed to write their name and date on the assignment and then put it in the "completed assignments" box. This keeps my table clear of clutter and my mind free from worrying about losing their work.

About once a quarter, we empty the box, saving their best work in sheet protectors and putting them in their notebooks in chronological order. Each child has a notebook. We throw away things that we don't love or need to keep. That's it! Simple and effective.

Organizing School Books

This is a great topic because there are a gazillion ways to do it and every family is different. The trick to organizing your school space is to keep it simple and do what works best for the season of life you're in.

For example, if you are on bed rest, you might want to store workbooks and other homeschooling supplies by the couch. If you are moving, keep them in a portable container. Even a backpack will do.

At our home, we have one bookshelf with dedicated homeschool space on it. All the younger kids know that they are to return their things to their shelf at the end of each day. That way, I can find school books when I need to, and we spend a lot less time searching for things at the beginning of each school day.

We keep our pens and pencils on a windowsill next to

the pencil sharpener—all within easy reach of the kitchen table, where we do most of our homeschooling. Again, keep things simple.

Laundry (Mount Never-rest) Ideas

Ahhh, the laundry room. I love my laundry room. In it, sit two of the best inventions of the 21st century: a washing machine and a dryer. And sometimes, a laptop computer! Yes, I have been known to write in my laundry room. The smell of clean laundry is comforting to me and I love the humming sound that the washing machine makes. It's the sound of productivity!

I love the sense of accomplishment that folding laundry brings me. There is just something about pulling clothes out of the dryer and folding them that makes me happy. It's probably a sickness but I've decided to go with "it works for me" when it comes to tackling this big job. I've tried almost every laundry solution I have heard about over the years, too.

After twenty-two years of marriage and seven children, I think I may have found a solution that works better than any of the others. Adopting this new method involved two main things:

- ❖ Surrendering my desire to have every item folded perfectly
- ❖ Willingness to let my children go without clean clothes if they failed to do their own laundry.

Notice it has nothing to do with a method. *It's all about my attitude.* Yep! You guessed it! I don't do laundry much anymore, even though I really do enjoy it. I simply have too many other things that truly need my attention.

Put Your Kids To Work!

Yes, that's right. Even little ones can learn to operate your washer and dryer! I know, because at our house, our kids do it. Even the five year old is in on the laundry action, with a little routine that is all hers.

Some of you are way ahead of me on this and you're probably saying, "DUH!!" right now, but for those of you who are still holding on to your perfectly folded towels and neatly pressed shirts, let me just tell you that releasing this chore to the kids was one of the best homemaking decisions I ever made.

Here's how we do it. Instead of each person in our family

doing his or her own laundry, we divide the task by rooms. This allows those who share a bedroom to work together on laundry. It also cuts down on the number of loads being done, and has the added side benefit of helping prepare the kids for life on their own.

Five Steps for Saving Time in the Laundry Room

-  Sort by room, not by person. Each bedroom has its own laundry hamper and its own laundry basket. Sharpie markers are used to write the bedroom name (i.e. little boys' room) on each hamper. Hampers stay in the bedrooms until they are full and need to be washed.
-  Each room has a basket that sits on the counter in the laundry room. As the laundry comes out of the dryer, it is put into the appropriate basket. Sometimes, a child will start their laundry and then not be home to run it through. This is when having their own basket in the laundry room comes in very handy. It's easy for another child to take their clothes out of the dryer and put them into the correct basket without much effort.

- 🕒 You wear it, you wash it. The children are responsible for running their own clothes through as well as folding and putting their own laundry away. If they go into the laundry room and there are clothes in the washer or dryer, they move them through the cycle.
- 🕒 Each child, down to the five year old, can run both machines. It's much easier now that we use front loaders, but when we had top loaders, we had a little stool next to the washer for the shorter laundry doers. This took a little training (and a few ruined articles of clothing), but it was worth it for the freedom that came from allowing the children to serve in this way.
- 🕒 Keep it moving. I have a friend who charges her kids hard cash if their clothes aren't in their drawer the same day they're laundered. So far, I haven't had to do that because the sheer amount of laundry that's done at our house doesn't leave much time for lolly-gagging laundry goers! There is always someone next in line so the laundry moves through fairly quickly. Since all the kids know the drill, they move the laundry along as necessary.
- 🕒 Community property is community responsibility.

Anything that comes into the laundry room that's not the property of an individual, such as towels and table cloths, is washed and folded by the person who is next in line to wash clothes. Kitchen towels are taken to the laundry room by the children who are cleaning the kitchen, and so on.



Backup Happens. Life is never predictable. As much as I would like to say that we have a perfect system and that things are always done according to plan, they're not. Occasionally I find myself with a laundry room full of clean clothes that need to be folded and put away. When this happens, a family folding party is usually the remedy. Be creative. Stay flexible. Keep trying new things!



Socks are still my nemesis and are usually put into the sock basket if they are not matched immediately out of the dryer. About once a year, I contemplate moving to Arizona, just so we can spend more time in flip flops than we do wearing socks. Who knows. We may do that yet... and if we do, you'll know why!

An Organized Office = Less Stressful Daylight

We are privileged to share a home out in the beautiful Washington countryside with Jay's mom and dad. Jay's mom, Jerry, is an expert organizer and so we have had fun trying new ways to keep our shared office neat and tidy. A few months ago, Jerry and I took on the task of re-organizing our office. It had been a year since we had done it—and believe me, it showed!

The kids helped us take everything out except for the big desk, right down to extra chairs and shelves. I wish I had kept pictures of the process because it was something to see. We managed to fill six huge bags with items to give away. It's amazing how fast we accumulate things!

I always recommend taking everything out of the room you are working on and then putting things back in as you purge and sort. However, if you don't have time to do that, start with the one area of your office that is the primary feature: your desk.

Clear off the desk top first. Throw anything away that you don't need or that is garbage. Remember to be tough on yourself as you purge. Haven't used it in a few months? Store it in a box in the garage and then, if you haven't used

it in six months, consider getting rid of it, too. Keep that garbage can handy!

File important papers. We have a filing system in our house that I love. Every utility bill has its own file, and other things are easily categorized. For example, under “School,” I have three sub-folders: HSLDA membership info, WA state homeschool law, and annual testing information. The children have individual folders as necessary but this way, I know where to find important information in a hurry.

Sort mail as soon as it arrives at your house.

Mail, be it junk or otherwise, comes every day and can easily get out of control if you don't have a POA for it. Have a box or a bin where you can easily put your incoming mail.

Clean out desk drawers. Just like you would clean out a room—empty those drawers completely. I usually dump the drawer into a cardboard box and then begin putting things back while separating junk from necessary items.

Wipe the desk drawers out and put things back that you truly need. How often do you send out Easter cards, anyway? If you don't use them all the time, they don't belong in your desk. Put them away with seasonal things if necessary, and store them where you can find them when you need them.

Make Daily Cleanup a Habit

Have you ever learned to play an instrument or participated in a sport? If you have, then you know how important practice and consistency is if you want to learn a new skill!

Keeping your home free of clutter is a skill. Practice keeping up with it in the same way you would practice to learn any other skill. Once you are organized, it's not going to require much effort to keep things that way. Get into the habit of putting things where they go as soon as you are through using them.

Here are some more quick tips for making sure your new, organized self stays that way:

- ❖ Create a space for everything from car keys to tennis shoes.

- ❖ When something new comes in, consider letting something else go.
- ❖ Make sure the kids are responsible for tidying up their zones.
- ❖ Practice hospitality—celebrate by inviting company over for dinner or hosting an event at your house. There's nothing like company to motivate your inner cleanup girl!

Can't you just feel a more organized daylight coming? Life is made much easier when you don't have to waste precious time hunting for something that's been misplaced because of clutter.

And remember, organizing your daylight hours is all about managing your time. Carve out some time in your daily routine for cleanup and organizing. You'll be glad you did!