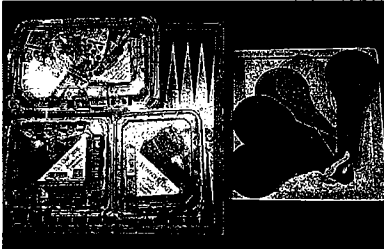


Learning environment 101: organizing your space

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It's tough to provide fun, at-home learning activities for your kids and still keep a neat house. All of those great discovery materials, craft supplies and books have to go somewhere. You want to make sure that learning centers are accessible and attractive, but you also don't want them taking over the entire house.

I have scoured the Internet to find parents who manage to contain the clutter and I have compiled their best tips. See the photo album at the bottom of the page for pictures of child-friendly, organized learning spaces.



Top ten tips from organized parents:

1. Use clear containers. Clear containers allow both kids and adults to see what materials are inside without tearing everything out of the drawers and cabinets. To facilitate cleanup, label each drawer. If your child is too young to read, put a picture of the item on the front of the drawer. The favorite product of the organized parents that I talked to were plastic drawer units like this one.

2. Put posters and visual aids at kid eye level. It does not matter what kind of great visuals you have if the kids can't get close and look at them.

3. Display books with the covers facing out. This creates interest and invites reading much more than seeing just the book spines. For a cheap way to display books using recycled cardboard containers, look here.



4. Use TV trays. TV trays can be pulled out to display a science experiment or art project and then be easily tucked away when not in use.

5. Bins are great for storing materials, because everyone can see exactly what is inside. Fancy storage units with decorative bins are available, but you can achieve the same effect by filling a bookshelf with inexpensive dish tubs.

6. Store items like puzzle pieces, dominoes, magnets and colored pencils in clear produce containers. They are transparent, snap shut tightly and stack neatly. Another option is using baby wipe containers or storage bowls.

7. Use the supermarket as inspiration and hang up whatever you can. Hang supplies on the wall or on a pegboard in clear bags or containers.

8. Mix it up. Change displays and materials as much as possible to keep kids interested. Put away items that have not been used in a while and bring them out again in a few months.

9. Make multipurpose areas. Put floor cushions on top of a low, sturdy coffee table to create seating for a reading area. Tuck books in baskets underneath the table. The reading nook can be easily converted into a craft area by removing the cushions.

10. Learn to enjoy your space. If there is an ant farm on your mantle or a miniature city taking over your end table, so what? Your house is not a model home for a magazine. When your kids grow up to be well-adjusted, educated adults, you are not going to look back and wish that your house had been more stylish.

Stay tuned for more tips from organized parents along with pictures of their wonderful spaces in the next part of this series. In the meantime, hop on over to the Wonder Years blog to see how one mother creates interesting learning areas for her children.

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