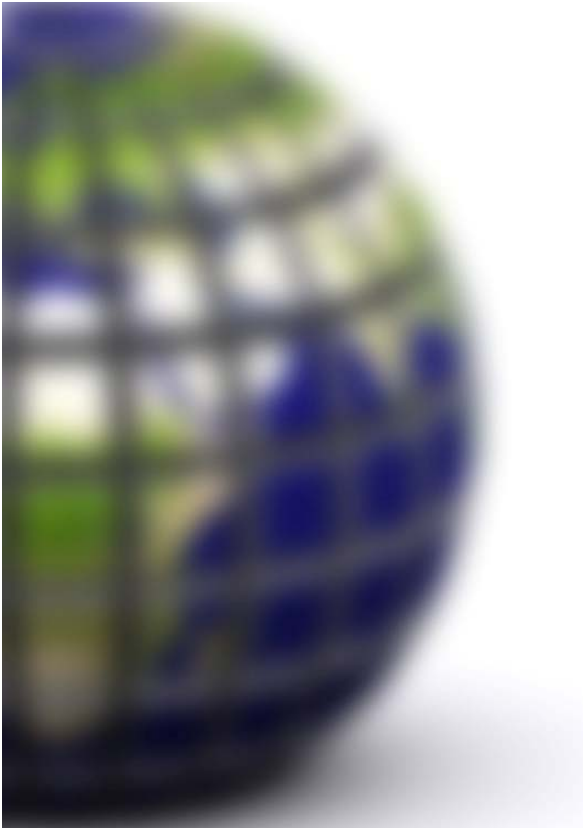


Low Cost-Time Saving Organizing Tips
Every Mom Should Know



What's the Problem?

Who couldn't use some extra help at a reasonable price when it comes to running their households? This is why I'm offering you this free eBook that is centered on helping you to become more organized in your own home and life. As the wife/mother, we often become the CEO of the household™: responsible for bills, paperwork, cleanliness, organization, shopping, and the children. While the men in our lives may do a share of the above, it never seems to equal the amount of time we spend doing it. It doesn't matter if we work outside the home or not; simply put, we're in charge (often by default). It's up to us to tackle the challenges handed to us and that's where my book and I come in to help you.

Have we not all experienced the following question: "Honey/Mom, where is my _____?" You can fill in the blank with anything that is applicable, but the most popular seem to be articles of clothing, homework/backpacks, bills, school paperwork, and mail. Don't you wish you had a dollar for every time you heard it? Personally, I'd be rich! I've dubbed this phenomenon the "St. Mommy, Patron Saint of All Lost Articles" Syndrome™. I know I'm not the only one who has experienced this phenomenon multiple times. Ladies, you are not alone; we've all been there and will be there again.

Why does this syndrome exist? Well, it's because of societal expectations as well as our own. I grew up in a typical 1970s family: Dad went to work and Mom stayed home to take care of us and the household. We never bothered Dad with the day-to-day issues of the house or school; that all fell to Mom. Obviously, times have changed since then and many of us work outside of the home (myself included). The expectations haven't changed, however. No one seems to blame the father if homework isn't done, bills aren't paid on time, or the house isn't cleaned. Those items still sit squarely on our shoulders. As wives and mothers, we wear many hats and we need to multi-task efficiently or face the blame society and we put on ourselves.

Don't despair—I understand where you are and how you feel! I am a wife, mother, and a professional and organizing is my specialty. I've worked within in my own household and with other clients on this very problem and have developed a system that can be applied to your situation. You can implement this successfully on your own or by engaging my services. Remember, we aren't taught to be organized like we're taught grammar or algebra. However, you can learn and this eBook contains tips that don't cost a lot and will save you time.

Preparation is Key

Instead of feverishly jumping into your project with no clear understanding of the problem and no clear objectives, you should start by organizing your thought process. Whenever I work with a client, I assess the situation with them, talk to them about why they're not successful with their current process, clarify their objectives, and then lay out a plan we can both follow. First, we'll start with a series of questions designed to get you thinking about your organizational process and where you might need help. I've left space for you to write your answers and I encourage you to do so because once you get it on paper, you're committing yourself to it.

1. What's the area of my life that I feel needs the most organization?
 - A. I never seem to have enough time to accomplish everything.

 - B. There's an area of my house that I can't stand.

 - C. I need a good method to control the paper flow in my house.

2. What's my current state of organization?
 - A. Highly organized but looking for new ideas.

 - B. Mostly organized but could use a little guidance.

 - C. I need help, when can you start?!

3. What, if any, are my roadblocks to being successfully organized?
 - A. I'm in good shape, but I like to learn about new ideas/processes.

 - B. My roadblocks are minimal and can be overcome with some good feedback from an expert in the field.

 - C. I have many roadblocks and could benefit from hands-on help from a professional organizer.

4. What's my style of learning?
 - A. I'm a do-it-yourselfer and a source for new ideas works for me.

 - B. I can do it on my own, but I want to be able to bounce ideas and problems off of someone else.

 - C. I need someone to work beside me as I learn.

Did those questions get your thought-process going? Identifying the problem is the first step in the problem-solving process:

1. Identify the problem.
2. Gather information about the problem.
3. List possible solutions to the problem.
4. Consider the advantages and disadvantages to each solution.
5. Choose a solution and implement it.
6. Evaluate how well the solution is working.

My fourth grader just learned this process in his Social Studies class; if a fourth grader can learn and apply the above process to his life, so can we!

Notice how the solution isn't implemented until Step 5? That's because the first four steps are dedicated to preparation. However, even with extensive preparation, your solution may not work the way you want it to. For example, you may choose to tackle the project on your own and find it's not progressing the way you want it to. This is perfectly okay because when you evaluate and discover it's not working, you have the freedom to choose another solution. It might mean that you need a little help from a professional. I will be honest: I don't ever play with electricity, no matter how simple the job is. I always call an electrician to take care of it because I recognize a professional is needed in this situation.

Here's the Solution

Have you ever looked at another mom and wonder how she juggles it all? It's as simple as she found a system that works for her. Systems exist to make our lives easier, so feel free to borrow from someone else. I'm sharing my system with you to apply in ten areas of your life that are low-cost, easy to implement and maintain, and will save you time.

Area #1: The Kitchen

This is appropriately dubbed the heart of the home. Do you feel as though things are exploding out of your cupboards? Can you easily find what you need to cook a meal? Do you find yourself buying something at the store only to get home and find you had one all along? You are definitely NOT alone in this aspect. No matter how much space a kitchen seems to have when you first move in, it seems to disappear quickly. If you add a husband and children to the mix, then not only does space evaporate, but items never seem to make it back to their rightful homes. It rapidly gets very frustrating.

I don't recommend you be the only keeper of the kitchen. The other members of your family need to learn your system so they can participate in cooking and clean-up. I recently implemented the following system in a client's home, which has two boys under seven (I also use it in my own home):

1. Label the cupboard doors so anyone looking for an item or putting one away can easily find where it should be kept.
2. For children, keep only non-breakable, harmless items on lower shelves.
3. For pantry items, use either a dedicated pantry or an eye-level, fairly shallow cabinet to store non-perishables.
4. Children's snacks should be kept on their level for easy access by them so you don't have to stop what you're doing to get it for them.
5. Keep a running grocery list on the refrigerator door or pantry so you can quickly and easily jot down an item when it's low or gone.

How much money and time have you invested in implementing this system in your kitchen? NONE, because this is a simple system that's easy to use and follow and costs nothing but a little bit of time!

Area #2: Playroom/Toys

Once your child is old enough to walk and follow simple directions, it's time to teach them the concept of picking up after themselves. We moms spend waaaaay too much time cleaning up after everyone and everything. If you start teaching them when they're young, they will learn a lifetime of good habits.

Designate an area to be toy central. It can be an entire room or just a toy box—just make sure you consistently use the same space. As your child gets older, the storage may change from a simple toy box or bucket to an array of shelves and bins. Keep reinforcing the concept to your children so they learn the way you want them to keep it.

1. At a young age, a toy box or bucket works really well to contain the toys. The nice thing is the box can be closed and the bucket can be hidden.
2. Keep it in the same place so your child learns the routine of where the toys are and where they belong when your child is done with them.
3. Always engage and encourage your child in the clean-up process. Positive reinforcement works very well.
4. Don't expect perfection from younger ones. The simple fact that all of the toys made it back into the box and the lid closes is good enough.

Note that there's a minimal cost in the investment of a toy box or bucket. Even as your children get older, plastic bins are sturdy and can be purchased at the dollar store. It will take some time for the children to learn the system, but once they do it saves you tons of time in the clean-up process and teaches them responsibility.

Area #3: The morning rush

Ah, yes—we all know it well: the crush of family members running around trying to get out the door all at the same time. It can be further complicated by smaller children needing more hands-on time that puts you further behind. Fortunately, my son is old enough to dress and eat by himself, but that doesn't mean he's completely independent.

Do yourself a favor and don't wait until the last minute in the morning because it will only succeed in making all of you crazed. This particular system is easy to follow and enables you to engage the other household members in it so all tasks don't end up falling on you.

1. Choose and lay out the next day's outfit the night before. My son wears a uniform to school, so when he folds and puts away his clothing for the week, he puts a shirt, a pair of pants, and a sweatshirt in a designated "day of the week" spot in his closet.
2. Pack lunches and snacks the night before. Children can pack their own from an assortment of choices you give them.
3. Homework and schoolbooks should be put in the child's backpack the night before.
4. Set the table for breakfast the night before.

All of the above can be delegated to various members of the family with you supervising as necessary. No monetary investment is needed and the time spent doing the tasks can be divided up among your family members. Needless to say, it saves tons of time (not to mention your sanity) the next morning because everyone will know where everything is and it will teach children responsibility for their own stuff.

Area #4: Homework

And, you thought when you graduated you would have no more homework. HA—that all changes when your children enter school. By the way, schools have this nasty habit of coming up with new ways to teach the very same things you learned in school. It can make you feel as though you don't know how to do anything (anyone ever hear of new math?).

Remember, you aren't doing your child a favor by doing the homework for them or by minimizing the importance of completing homework. We all learn best by doing, so the easiest way to assist our children is to set up a system that allows them to do their homework.

1. Institute the same time, same place rule. Simply put, have them do their homework at the same time (it can be flexible dependent upon activities) in the same place every day.
2. Do your best to eliminate distractions. Give them a snack beforehand, give them a little "bouncing" time, and give them a quiet space to work.
3. Make sure they have what they need to accomplish the task (e.g., pencils, pens, erasers, and paper).
4. Assist as needed. This can mean sitting with them as well as just providing supervision; it all depends on your child.

Consistency is the key here. Remember when you were potty-training them? You had to do it over and over and provide reinforcement for them to learn it. Homework is the same kind of thing. A system makes for a much more pleasant experience and allows your child to learn how to do it him/herself.

Area #5: Home office/computer area

There are days I feel as though there are preschoolers who know more about computers than I do, but the simple fact is that a majority of households have at least one computer in their home. My focus here is on garden-variety computer usage, such as Internet access, homework, bill paying, and email.

As the CEO of the household™, you need an organized command center in which to store household records, schedules, bills, and mail. You can't get anything done if you can't find it.

1. Decide on the best place for the computer area. Where you are most comfortable allowing your children to have access is the place to start.
2. Keep the paperwork you need close to the computer so it can be easily accessed when you need it.
3. Establish computer usage guidelines for the family. You can even purchase software that regulates what and how long various members of your family can be on the computer/Internet (cost varies dependent on the software).

Outside of the cost of the computer and maybe some software, all it takes is a little planning time to set up an efficient computer area for you and your family. Make sure you keep the items you need organized and close at hand so your time on the computer is well-spent. Also, don't be afraid to put limits on computer usage. No one ever died from not being able to play a game or surf the Internet aimlessly.

Area #6: Bills

Now that your computer area is all set up, you need to get your bills organized so they are paid on time. I love the electronic era because it's cut bill-paying time in half and saves money on envelopes and stamps! Honestly, you don't

have to be a computer programmer to receive and pay bills online; all you have to be able to do is access email and the Internet.

Most banks offer free online banking, so you should take advantage of it. Some banks even offer cash incentives for using online banking. My own bank just started that, so by doing what I've been doing for years, I now receive cash rewards for it. Talk about a win-win situation! You can also receive your bills online, which drastically cuts back on the amount of mail you collect and then have to sort through.

1. Set up online banking. Most banks have great websites that are very user-friendly. The advantages include payments sent electronically and a record of payment with your bank.
2. Request billing by email instead of snail mail. Not only does it save trees, but it saves you from having to sort through extra mail.
3. As the CEO of your household™, you know when your bills are due. Make sure you set aside the necessary time to access your bills and pay them.

Because online bill payment and electronic billing are free, it costs you nothing. Also, you'll save money on checks, envelopes, and stamps. Additionally, the amount of time spent setting up is minimal, so once it's done, bill-payment goes very quickly. Most people use their computers on a daily basis, so you'll actually spend less time on the process. Keep in mind the actual bills and the online banking are maintained by the companies that host them, so if your computer crashes, there are still records out there for you to access.

Area #7: Mail and paperwork

Unfortunately, just because you receive bills via email, it doesn't mean all the mail will disappear. Then, once your child enters school, the amount of paper that comes home can be staggering. Certain items must be maintained in some sort of written form because you possess the original. Don't panic. You can get a handle on the paperwork that comes your way and you can set up a system that enables you to easily retrieve it.

Mail and paperwork require a quick sort when they first appear in your house. Once you make a decision on whether you need to do something with it, then you can immediately divide it into different piles and go from there:

1. If it's junk (e.g., advertisement, an offer you don't want, or something that doesn't require any action on your part), shred it immediately (or delegate the task to one of your children).
2. If it's something that requires you to hang onto it long-term (e.g., house deed, loan/mortgage paperwork, tax records, birth and social security records), then you need to file it away. I suggest a fireproof safe for these items.
3. Designate broad categories for filing. Home is broad, but then break it down into mortgage, insurance, and repairs and improvements. Set it up so it's obvious to you and anyone you have helping you (use well-labeled folders).
4. Keep up with the filing. Take 10 minutes per day to sort and file so it doesn't seem so overwhelming.
5. If something requires action, take the necessary action immediately or purposely schedule a time to do so. You don't want to miss any important deadlines.

The key here is to break down the big task of mail and paperwork into easily attainable smaller tasks. You'll be able to stay on top of the paperwork and big piles won't haunt you.

Area #8: Schedules

Do you ever feel as though you never get out of the car? My mother had the most appropriate key chain for her car keys: "Mom's Taxi". If you have to keep track of more than one child's activities, it can make your head spin trying to remember who has to be where when. Add it to your other CEO responsibilities of bill payment, shopping, and cleaning and you've just cluttered your mind so much you can't remember your own name!

Take a deep breath and repeat this mantra: *I can keep track of everyone's schedule without losing my mind.* All it takes is a little preparation.

1. Calendars are a godsend. At your local store, you can buy a wipe-off calendar or a lined paper one. Write things down on the calendar as soon as they are scheduled.
2. If you have to keep track of more than one person, assign a line of each day to each person and use a different colored pen for each.
3. Post it in a public place so all members of the family can see and use it.
4. If you're computer savvy, put it all on a computer calendar and print it out weekly.

5. Set up a buddy system with another parent to trade off carpooling duties.

A calendar is a small investment to make to enable you to remember who needs to be where and when. It also allows you to teach your children to keep track of their own schedules and enables you to delegate carpooling when necessary.

Area #9: Chores

There seems to be an unwritten rule that assigns all tasks related to chores to the wife/ mother. There also seems to be a never-ending supply of chores that need to be done. Men and children are notoriously blind in this area. They never see what needs to get done around the house. I'm guessing they think little fairies come into the house overnight and magically do all of the chores so they don't have to!

However, we know who the fairies are—US. Remember, you are the CEO of the household™, so you choose to continue to do it yourself or you to delegate some tasks. My firm belief is no one in the household should be exempt from helping with chores (babies would be an exception), therefore delegate at will. No CEO became successful by doing everything him/herself.

1. Delegate chores based on ability.
2. Be prepared for some imperfection, but don't let older children/husbands get away with it all the time.
3. Set out clear, written instructions and expectations.
4. It's okay to pay for work well done.

You can't do it all yourself, nor should you. Other members of the family cause messes and live in your house, so feel free to develop and utilize their skills. It might cost a little money to pay an allowance, but it's well worth getting some precious time back for yourself.

Area #10: Closets

Some people have closets that are so bad they are convinced monsters live in them. Apparently, these very same monsters eat all of their stuff as well. In this day and age, it is possible to find a reasonably priced closet system that will fit the style of closet you have.

I am a “Home Improvement” sitcom junkie and I remember an episode when Tim built Jill a closet system that included a remote control spinning rod. You don’t have to go to that extreme (or expense) to put some order into your closet.

1. Purge all items you aren’t using or that don’t fit.
2. Put into place a system that works for you. It can range from something purchased at Wal-Mart to something as expensive as hiring a special closet company (you decide on the cost).
3. Keep the items stored so you can easily find and see what you need (clear plastic bins work well).
4. The goal is to pick a system you are able to maintain.

The amount of money you spend here is entirely up to you. Just be sure to pick a system that fits your closet and you can easily maintain so you can avoid the stuff-eating monster in the closet.

Call to Action

Since it bears repeating, here's the problem-solving process again:

1. Identify the problem.
2. Gather information about the problem.
3. List possible solutions to the problem.
4. Consider the advantages and disadvantages to each solution.
5. Choose a solution and implement it.
6. Evaluate how well the solution is working.

Remember, you need a plan of attack to become the successful CEO you know you can be. Digest the information I've provided. Answer the questions to get your juices flowing. Take the time to plan your next steps so you can attain the solution you are seeking.

If you are interested in more information about my services, please feel free to contact me either by email at keepitsimplewithsue@bex.net or by phone at (419)280-1141. We can set up a time for a conversation in which we can ask each other questions and determine if we'd be a good match to work together. We can talk about the answers to the questions in this eBook. Different clients have different needs, so my services are designed to cover the spectrum between hands-on side by side organizing to simple email/telephone coaching.

The ball is now in your court. Start today to become the organized wife/mother you want to be and the envy of all of your friends and colleagues. Stay tuned for new eBooks that focus more narrowly on a variety of topics. These will be available for purchase through my website at www.keepitsimplewithsue.com.