

Helping Kids Get Organized

• Some Suggestions for Parents •

by Ellen D. Fiedler, Ph.D. Wings for Education, Inc., New Buffalo, MI • ellenfiedler@comcast.net

Bright kids often are “organizationally-challenged.” In fact, the brighter they are, the more likely it is that they will have issues with organization (or, more likely, the grown-ups in their lives will have concerns about their not being organized).

Among the reasons for this are: a) they have good memories and, for awhile anyway, are able to rely on remembering where they saw something last, b) they have so many interests and so many things going on at once that their lives simply spin out of control, c) they are typically internally-motivated and resist all external efforts to get them to conform to anyone else’s ideas of how they should live their lives, d) they are unaware of the knowledge and/or lack the skills that would help them be more organized, and e) organization requires mundane work, and their brains aren’t wired that way.

Some strategies that may (or may not) work in helping kids get more organized include:

- Color-coding. Have kids use different colored folders/index cards/markers for different categories of things they need to keep track of in their lives. (*Note*: The kids need to figure out what those categories might be and decide which colors should be used for which.) Some kind of chart or “key” can be posted on the wall of their room or in some other convenient location (e.g., kitchen or bathroom). The kids should decide whether/where the chart should be posted.
- Timers. Use a wind-up or electronic timer to keep track of when it’s time to change activities, quit doing whatever they’re doing, or whatever.
- Alarm watches. Give kids an alarm watch and teach them how to set it. Then, they can list some of the situations in which it might be useful to have it go off to remind them of what they need to do at a particular time. They also can decide how much of an “advance warning” they need. Set a “trial run” for a week and then talk with them about how it’s working/what they’d like to change to make it work better.
- Appointment books/“Agendas”/calendars. Some kids like to have a hands-on calendar for all of their appointments, notes about things to do, addresses, etc. These can either be one they carry with them (although there’s always the danger of its getting lost) or one of the kinds that hang on the wall.
- Technology. Most kids love using technology and are good at doing so, and it can be hugely useful in innumerable ways. PDA’s and computers can be synched with each other or used independently (as “stand alone” devices). Many cell-phones are available that also double as PDA’s. Here are some ideas that can help kids with organizing their lives using technology:

o Use along the same lines as the timers and alarm watches for reminders/alerts.

Page 1 of 2

Ellen D. Fiedler, Ph.D., Wings for Education, Inc.,
4175 Creek Drive, New Buffalo, MI 49117
ellenfiedler@comcast.net

- *Calendar functions.* Anything that you can think of that needs to be kept organized (and more) can be kept on a PDA and/or computer: appointments and other calendar events, with reminders as far ahead of time as the kids would like to be reminded of each; phone numbers & addresses (email & snail mail); notes; “to do’s”; and all kinds of miscellaneous information that would get lost if it were on scraps of paper. (*Note:* Items on these calendars can be color-coded, as well, using whatever system the kids think would be most useful to use.)
- *Podcasts.* An unbelievable assortment of useful information is available free for downloading as podcasts. These can be accessed directly on the computer or on an iPod.
- *Mind-mapping.* (Try “Googling” it! Among the sources you’ll find listed is the following website with free mind-mapping software: http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Main_Page.)
- *Role models/mentors.* Help kids find out how successful adults organize their lives, encouraging them to find a wide range of methods and then choosing those that they think would be useful for them to use, themselves.
 - o A related idea is to look at the lives of remarkable individuals from history (e.g., Leonardo da Vinci) and find out how they kept their lives organized. Then, imagine what they might have done today if they had the resources available to them that are available now, including technology.
- *Creative Problem Solving.* The Creative Problem Solving Model is a tried & true method for breaking complex problems down into manageable stages starting with the “Mess” (actually now called “Objective Finding”) and proceeding through “Fact Finding”, “Problem Finding”, “Idea Finding”, “Solution Finding”, and “Acceptance Finding.” Here’s a website that will give you a quick overview: <http://www.creativityland.net/images/OPCPSppt.pdf>. This approach is very helpful for getting creative kids beyond the simple pleasures of generating ideas to actually selecting and implementing solutions.

FINALLY

Remember that your kids have their own agenda (*i.e.*, *what they want to do and how/when/if they want to do it*) and that your influence may be more limited than you’d like.

- o Therefore, in talking with your kids, you might begin by acknowledging that.
- o Some of us (and therefore, some of our kids) really **DO** work better under pressure. As one gifted girl (who is now a successful obstetrician) said, “I thrive under stress.” However, some of these “deadline workers” run out of time as they push the deadline. One idea that may help is to start the planning process with “Day Zero” (the due date) and plan backwards – *i.e.*, what needs to be done the day before it’s due, the day before that, etc.

From: Fiedler, E. D. (2007, April). *Intensity at home: What’s a parent to do?* Presentation at the 2007 Bay City Spring Conference, Bay City, MI.

Page 2 of 2

Ellen D. Fiedler, Ph.D., Wings for Education, Inc.,
4175 Creek Drive, New Buffalo, MI 49117

ellenfiedler@comcast.net