

Managing TIME WORK & FAMILY

FACT SHEET

Organizing the Household

It is 7:30 a.m.

The bus will be at the corner in 10 minutes to pick up your children. Then you have to dash out the door to get to work by 8:00 a.m.

But, this morning your son cannot find his shoes, and your daughter says that the dress she wants to wear needs a button.

Does this ever happen at your house?

Families with parents who work outside the home may find that the day-to-day running of the household is a major problem. Family scheduling, inventory management, purchasing, and delegating tasks are part of the job, which could be described as household management.

The Management Process

The management process involves designing a method or strategy for reaching your goals. This process involves:

- Identifying the problem to be solved.
- Obtaining information.
- Examining possible courses of action.
- Considering the consequences of each alternative.
- Selecting the best alternative.

Successful managers are well organized. They know that to get necessary tasks completed, they must set priorities and develop plans. They develop systems that help them in managing both their home and work environments.

Keeping everything in its proper place, establishing systems for getting out of the house in the morning, keeping track of important dates, housework, shopping, and managing papers and bills can help you begin to organize your home.

Getting Out of the House in the Morning

A common reason people run late in the morning is that they do not consider what they will need until they are ready to leave. If you take a few minutes in the evening to plan your morning activities, it will ease your departure. Children can also be encouraged to organize their belongings the night before.

Establish a routine. Establishing a routine will help you do things more quickly. Spend some time thinking about all the things that need to be done in the morning.

Can some of the activities be done the night before, such as making lunches, choosing what to wear, or setting the breakfast table? Once you have planned a routine, write it down and try it

for a few days. Following a trial period, make any necessary adjustments.

Other suggestions. You might also:

- Pack your purse and briefcase in the evening and leave them by the front door.
- Establish a place where your keys are always kept.
- Stay with the task you start. Do not hop from room to room as you get ready in the morning. Stopping to fix the children their breakfast, while in the middle of getting dressed, wastes time. If your children are too young to make their own breakfast, consider getting up early enough to get dressed *before* starting breakfast.

Important Dates and Times

Family calendar. A large family calendar can help you keep track of important times, dates and events. Stress the importance of writing down their activities to each family member, so that the whole family will know what is going on. Parents and older children should remember to transfer important dates to their own personal calendar.

When choosing a calendar, get one with spaces that are large enough to write information and record appointments. There should be ample space for notes, and possibly a list of telephone numbers.

Bills, cards and correspondence. To help get bills, cards and correspondence out on time, you could:

- Establish a regular time each month to review upcoming dates and shop for cards or gifts.
- Purchase a variety of cards, or get blank cards and write your own message.
- Address and sign each card. Write the date they are to be mailed in the corner where the stamp should go.
- Stack the cards in a basket by the door and mail them when necessary.

Housework

Housework is another key area in which improved organizational skills can be beneficial. Planning is the key to a low-maintenance home.

In this case, as in others, you have to stand back and look at your situation with new eyes. Most of us get so used to our home environment and our usual way of doing things, that we do not notice what needs changing.

Unnecessary items. One of the first things that can be done to minimize housework is to get rid of unnecessary items.

- Eliminate all unused equipment and clothing, impractical furniture and temperamental houseplants.
- Have a garage sale or donate items to your local thrift shop or emergency shelter.

Storage. Once you have disposed of excess baggage, make sure you have the best storage you can create.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are the right items stored here?
- How can this space be made more useful?
- Would dividers, bins or half-shelves be useful?
- Do I need to increase the actual storage space by adding a new shelf, etc?
- What can I do right now to eliminate obvious clutter and messiness?

Other suggestions. Other suggestions for managing housework include:

- Set up a practical maintenance schedule for you and your family. One benefit of designing a maintenance schedule is that once you have established a routine, you move with greater speed. Post a reminder list of chores in each room.
- Put together a carry-along kit with the supplies you will need for most clean-up tasks. Take it with you as you work in each room.
- Give yourself five minutes to work in each room. Prioritize and do the important things first. Experiment to see what will work best for you.
- Leave an area as you found it. Get used to always putting things away when you are finished using them.

Shopping

The key to organized shopping is developing a good list of everything that you need.

When doing general shopping, organize your list around your schedule for the day. If you are on one side of town to attend a meeting, make sure to pick up any supplies you need from shops on that side of town.

Master list. When going grocery shopping, it can be helpful to develop a master list of the things that you buy. Once you have a good list, photocopy it and keep copies where they can be easily found.

When making a list for grocery or other shopping, write down everything that you need to pick up. Don't trust your memory!

It is also important to teach family members to routinely jot down items on the shopping list when they are low—not out.

Other suggestions. Additionally you can:

- Plan all your meals at least one week in advance. Start making a list of the ingredients you will need so that you can pick them up on your next shopping trip.
- Try to minimize the number of trips to the store. Buy supplies in multiples (three boxes of cereal, two rolls of tape).
- Shop in bulk—buy as much as you can store. Shopping once per week or month will cut down on your impulse buying.

Papers and Bills

Keeping track of important papers and bills is a troublesome area in many families. Ultimately you want to be able to easily find any paper when you want it.

Home business center. Establishing a home business center is one of the first things you can do to help manage your paperwork.

This center can be in any room of the house, and should have adequate lighting; a waste basket; a box or letter holder for incoming mail; a desk, table or countertop for writing checks and making lists; a drawer or box for small supplies (pencils, pens, etc.); and a file drawer or file box for storage.

Other family members should be familiar with the center and should be able to locate any information in case the primary bill-payer is out of town or ill.

Handling day-to-day papers. After establishing work and storage space of some kind, you are ready to develop a system of handling day-to-day papers and records. One way is to use a bill holder with pockets to separate unpaid and paid bills. Bills go into the "pay" envelope when they are received, and when they are paid they go into the "file" envelope for eventual storage.

A loose-leaf notebook or household operating manual is another system for organizing materials. The notebook can have sections or pockets for bills to be paid, receipts to be filed, warranty information, etc.

When information is needed, you can pick up the entire manual and flip to the correct section and page. Because of the manual's bulk, remember to return it to its original location.

Storing valuables and documents. Each of us has valuables which should be kept in a fire-proof, theft-proof storage space—either a home safe or a bank safe deposit box. Many documents are difficult, if not impossible, to replace. It is important to store valuables and documents in a safe place.

Other tips.

- File important papers regularly. Choose a basket or a “to file” folder to hold your papers that are waiting to be filed. Establish a set time to file—at least once per week. Do not let your papers pile up!
- Instead of asking yourself, “Could I possibly use this one day?” ask “What is the worst thing that could happen if I throw this out?”

If the answer is nothing serious, toss it.

Conclusion

Organizing a home requires time and energy, but pays off quickly. Thinking through problems which keep your home from running smoothly, looking at alternative solutions, and choosing the best methods are steps in the home management process.

You can begin to organize your home by establishing systems for getting out of the house in the morning, keeping track of important dates, housework, shopping, and managing papers and bills.

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