

The paper chase

The school year brings with it an additional mountain of clutter. Here's how to avoid getting buried.

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The return to [school](#) means the return of kid-generated paper clutter. So what's the best way to deal with piles of homework, art projects, precious essays and permission slips? We talked to professional organizers — who happen to be experienced moms — to find out their best tips and tricks on wrangling kids and their schoolwork.

1. Follow a routine, and make schoolwork a priority. Set up a time and place for homework, says Kathleen Edelstein, of Magically Organized in Williamstown. Whether it's at the dining room table or a desk, give kids a free and clear area to work in. Keep their school supplies handy, even if it's in a drawer in the china server.

"Know that every day, no matter what's going on, that's the time and place where you sit down and do your homework," says Edelstein. "Having a routine leads to responsibility."

Teachers establish a routine for their students, and parents can, too, says Liz Byham, of Creative Home Organizing in Voorhees. The former teacher and [mom](#) has her kids walk in the door, hang up their jackets, empty their backpacks and put everything in its place: papers, lunch boxes and packs.

At bedtime, make sure the backpacks are ready for the next day, says Byham.

2. Give them a fresh start. Provide new school supplies, says Ellen Faye, a professional organizer in Cherry Hill and the mother of a high school student and a college freshman. "I'm a mom with an organizer's perspective," says Faye. "I think it's critical that they (get) a [fresh](#) start. Give them clean folders; don't use half-chewed up notebooks from last year. Make sure their desk is clean and ready to go."

Written by **KIM MULFORD** | Courier-Post Staff

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MORE INFORMATION

Kathleen Edelstein is a professional organizer based in Williamstown. Visit www.magicallyorganized.com or visit her Facebook page at www.Facebook.com/magicallyorganized

Ellen Faye is a professional organizer based in Cherry Hill. Visit www.ellenfaye.com

Liz Byham is a professional organizer and former teacher in Voorhees. Visit www.creativehomeorganizing.com

Speaking of school supplies, the older students get, the less likely you'll know what they'll need until the night before a project is due, Faye says. Try to anticipate their last-minute demands and keep office supplies on hand, so you don't have to make an emergency run to the store.

3. Check bookbags daily.

If not, says Edelstein, "within a week, you could end up with a mountain of stuff to go through. That can be so overwhelming." Separate out things that are the children's responsibility from the parents' responsibility. Dedicate five to 10 minutes daily to filling out forms and responding to teachers' notes. Put them immediately into the child's folder to go back to school, says Edelstein. "Otherwise, it becomes mayhem."

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Avoid making piles of papers "to deal with later," says Byham. Instead, use the "touch it once" rule. Make a decision about each piece of paper the first time you pick it up.

4. Check the school website. Keep a pulse on your child's grades by logging onto the school website, says Faye. If you spot trouble on the horizon, you can get additional help before grades slip too far.

Keep communicating with your child's teacher so you know what's going on, and don't miss "back to school" night, Faye adds.

5. Save what's precious. Keep a large plastic tub for each child, and stow away their favorite pieces of artwork, projects and papers. During the summer or when it's full, sort through and toss what you can (and enlist your child's help).

"You have to be hard on yourself," says Edelstein. "Usually, your child is not attached to it — it's you." When the child moves out one day, they can take the tote with them.

If you can't part with even one masterpiece, lay them out and take a picture. Put the photo in a keepsake book or scan the works and stow them on a flash drive.

6. Keep a family calendar. Hang a calendar in a prominent location, where even the youngest children can see it. Try using a dry-erase calendar and make a rule that only parents can write or erase items from the calendar. (Consider hanging it out of reach.) Color codes can help even non-readers know what's going on, says Edelstein. Assign each family member a color and use that color to write their activity.

But don't let your kids get overscheduled, advises Faye. Make sure kids are getting enough time to sleep, eat and study. "We have to help guide them to the right degree, so they're not completely stressed and overwhelmed," says Faye.

5. Be patient and flexible. The first month of school is more stressful for kids than even their parents, says Edelstein. Don't put too much pressure on the kids until everyone gets used to the new calendar and system. And adapt your organizing methods to fit your family.

"There are a million different ways you can do it," says Edelstein.

Reach Kim Mulford at (856) 486-2448 or kmulford@camden.gannett.com



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www.ellenfaye.com

ellen@ellenfaye.com