

Good organization helps set up students for success

Tardy bells. Locker combinations. Yellow buses. Sack lunches. Shoes that give you blisters. School has officially started.

And in households across America, the cries are sounding: “Where’s my homework? Have you seen my soccer shoes? You stole my charger! Hurry, we’ll be late!”

But not at Lynn Stone’s house. Two weeks before school started this year, the mother of four teenagers looked ahead. Seeing that all four of her kids would be in high school, Stone, of Manhattan Beach, California, anticipated “life was about to get crazy, and I wanted to get ahead of it.”

So she called professional organizer Erica Thompson, owner of Organized by Design, to give her and her kids a running start.

“With the kids all involved in different sports, and two working parents, the house is nonstop,” Stone told me over the phone last week.

The day starts 6 a.m. when her 15-year-old son goes surfing and ends at 9 p.m. when her 14-year-old daughter gets home from dance practice. In between, the other two teens are off to football and cheer.

I’m tired just thinking about it.

An interior designer, Stone said, “I know how to make my house look pretty, but I wanted it to be pretty and organized.”

She also wanted to make sleep a priority for everyone. Amen!

That meant streamlining the steps between getting up and getting out the door.

Enter Thompson. “Lynn knows that the more organized everyone is the less time they waste,” said Thompson, who spent two days at the Stone residence working with



AT HOME WITH
Marni Jameson

the four teens to make their rooms and study areas more efficient.

“The kids were on board from the start,” Stone said. “Only one (the surfer) rolled his eyes and said, ‘Really, Mom?’ But now he loves how his room looks and works.”

Thompson started with the closets. “We did a big edit,” Thompson said. “In each child’s room, we took out the old to make room for the new. If a closet is packed, you can’t see everything.”

To free up space, Thompson switched out all the bulky, assorted hangers and replaced them with slim, velvet ones — white for the girls, taupe for the boys. Finding clothes is a lot easier and the closets look better.

Thompson also made good use of underbed storage. “You have to do what works for each kid,” she said. “You might not want your underwear in a bin, but for one of the boys, moving socks and underwear out of the closet and into bins that slide under the bed, made more sense to him.”

Having all pieces of a uniform easy to pull together also saves time. “You can’t simply switch out a cheer uniform’s green shirt if you can’t find it,” Stone said. “Plus, every cheer outfit has a different-colored bow. You need all the pieces

in the right place, organized and ready to go.”

Next, Thompson worked on making the study areas inviting and organized. “If they can sit down and have everything they need and not be hunting for their chargers, they aren’t frustrated before the homework begins,” Stone said.

Thompson loves seeing the transformation. “Kids often don’t realize how much better life can be if they start the day from an organized place,” she said. But now the Stone kids do.

Here are more tips from Thompson to help time-pressed parents get their students from their bed to the bus faster.

- A space of one’s own. A dedicated workspace that is visually appealing and well-organized helps kids build study habits. You need a desk, good lighting, a comfortable chair, and a few personal touches. Without overcrowding the work area, add a photo of the student with family or friends, a few favorite books, a plant, and maybe a fun, color-coordinated pencil holder.

“If you surround them with what they love, they will be more motivated to settle down and do homework,” Thompson said.

- Drawers divided. Desk drawers often become chaotic catchalls. Take everything out. Refresh school supplies and use a drawer divider when putting items back. Drawer inserts make drawers visually calming and make finding supplies easier.

- Hook or nook. A place for everything is a key organizing principle, and for students, that means a place to park backpacks and bookbags. Whether a hook in the mudroom, or a nook in the bedroom,

backpacks should have a dedicated space (not the kitchen table) where kids can drop them when they get home and grab them when they go.

- A launch pad. Stone’s house doesn’t have a mudroom, but each teen has a launch pad in his or her room, an area where they put all they will need for school and sports the next day.

In homes that have mudrooms, a dedicated space there for each

child also works.

- Baskets and bins. Corraling unwieldy items like toys, hats and bathing suits in labeled bins, creates instant organization and makes it easy for kids to put things away and find them.

- Fuel stations. Active kids are often going from 7 in the morning to 7 at night, so they’ll need healthy

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