

Get summer-ready

School's out, let the organizing – and fun – begin!

• MIRIAM GOLD

Remember back when the pandemic was in full force and we were locked down in our homes day after day? I do, and if you stop reading here, I won't blame you.

Who wants to remember that time? I certainly don't. It's summer and I plan to be at the beaches and parks, and maybe even do a little shopping (malls are air-conditioned, so clearly they are a great place to chill). See what I did there? Did I get you to keep reading?

When the pandemic started, I wrote an article for the *Magazine* titled "Organizing in the time of corona," about the importance of families sharing household responsibilities. Families that clean, cook and do laundry together, stay together. We saw how dividing chores helped children and partners develop good habits, learn new skills, built teamwork, and gave each individual an opportunity to contribute to the home.

So what have I noticed post-pandemic, you ask?

Being housebound for 18 months created an increased amount of items brought into the home, and highlighted issues between minimalists living with pack-rats. Children needed more toys and activities while parents worked from home and needed to create office areas and purchase supplies. While some added to the clutter and felt comfortable with a lot of "stuff" around, others focused on decluttering and organizing. These differing approaches created friction and discontent. As a social worker and professional organizer, I see many "organizationally mixed" families and relationships. While this is not a recent phenomenon, it certainly increased during the pandemic.

Where do we go from here?

First, ask yourself one simple question: "What is the goal for my home?" My client's usual response is, "A place that is functional and calm." While that may mean different things to different people, the roadmap for a calm home is respect, compromise, decluttering and organizing.

Here are a few tips to get you started:

1. *Begin by 'talking it out' and finding reasonable solutions where all can meet in the middle and be happy.* For example: Keep key areas clutter-free, such as kitchen, living and dining rooms.

2. *Allocate one designated area for the "collectors" to store their items.* Perhaps each bedroom should have

a shelf, drawer or under bed box that is designated for that person's "clutter." (Declutter those areas every six months to stave off overflow).

3. *Empty school backpacks of books, papers and the random candy wrappers you inevitably will find.* Summer is also pre-sale time for the following school year. Take inventory of what you have and what needs to be purchased.

4. *Sort through winter clothing to make room in your closets for summer items.* I usually recommend doing this with your children so they can be a part of the process. They know what they like and don't like, wear and don't wear, and what they have grown out of.

5. *Ask yourself what items you actually use and ditch the rest.* Put items up for sale on Facebook Marketplace and appropriate WhatsApp groups, and/or put together a donation bag for clothing, assorted household items, toys and crafts (we all accumulated more than we needed during corona quarantine). This is a wonderful activity for kids to take part in. Encourage them to "let go" of items that no longer serve them in order to free up space for something they want and will need space to store.

6. The school year (even during corona) kept everyone on a schedule. As school is over, *it's essential to set up a "summer" schedule for the family.* This will include activities in and out of the home. Everyone should have at least one "cleaning or organizing" task that they handle. Hopefully, some of these tasks will even carry over into the fall. Similarly, as most of us worked out of our homes this past year, now is a good time to sort through our "office areas," file papers or to clear out digital space that may have accumulated.

7. *Designate a spot for your outside items, such as balls, grilling tools, outdoor tableware, sunscreen, bug repellent and other assorted objects.* I find an outdoor shed, bucket or trunk does the job well. Store like items together. For example, keep beach/pool items together so you do not waste precious time running through your home looking for towels, sun hats, beach toys and sunscreen. (I would also keep some sunscreen in your daily bag to reapply as needed.)

8. *Rethink your space.* You may not have the correct storage systems for the items you have and need. Invest in closed closets for your living room, den, playroom, laundry room or wherever needed. Buy baskets or containers to store items and make sure these storage pieces have enough space to add items if needed. (I believe in the one-in, one-out rule.) People tend to forget vertical space, so use yours wisely.

9. *Make your bed every day.* I know, you're thinking, come on Miriam, that's just too much! I promise you, making your bed daily is a good habit and is an instant way to feel organized. You are less likely to have a messy room when the bed is made. Try it out and let me know if it works.

10. *Commit!* Make a commitment to do the work or absolutely nothing will change. Create a list of your clutter-collecting areas and make cleaning them up a part of your weekly chores.

GETTING ORGANIZED for summer will help you enjoy the warmer weather and transition to fall because you have already decluttered and organized most items. Staying organized throughout the summer is not very difficult to maintain, it just takes a little planning and proper setup. Remember, you don't have to get rid of those puzzles you spent so much time working on during corona, but perhaps display one or two and deconstruct the rest.

With compromise, respect, commitment and some simple organizing techniques, you can quickly organize and create a new dynamic for your home.

And now as I have completed writing these tips, I will reward myself with an iced coffee and pool time. Luckily, my pool bag is packed, so all I have to do is grab it and go.

Now let's get this done and enjoy summer! ■

The writer lives in Jerusalem and is the founder of Gold Standard Organizing. www.goldstandardorganizing.com



KEEP ALL office items in one place. (Photos: Miriam Gold)

THE TABLE that didn't fit with a new apartment's decor provided a functional, cute use of outdoor entrance space.

