



WHEN YOU prepare food in advance, you are doing the work once, saving time and energy later when you are tired from a long day. (Photos: Courtesy)



NOW THERE is more than enough time to get things done, and the whole family can help – whether polishing silver, folding laundry or doing 'sponja.'



# Home organizing in the time of coronavirus

• MIRIAM GOLD

One of my favorite movie lines comes from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*: "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." Hmm, that's a great quarantine movie for the whole family now that I think of it!

It seems as if coronavirus is making us all stop and take stock of our families, relationships, hobbies, work and home life.

If you ever felt "there's just not enough time in the day to get things done," now there is only time. Let me first acknowledge that one person in the family cannot be responsible for all the cleaning, cooking, laundry, childcare and schedules. And the list goes on. Families must pull together to designate work and contribute to the running of the home. You all live in one space and everyone should contribute to keeping it organized.

In your place of business, work is delegated, so why not at home? Delegating work is also good training for your kids. Chores help children develop good habits, learn new skills, build teamwork, and gain an opportunity to contribute to the home. Bottom line: When your family helps around the house, it saves you time and helps them take pride in their surroundings.

As a social worker and professional organizer, I'd like to share some tips for time management, organizing and delegating responsibilities such as homeschooling, laundry, cooking, cleaning and more.

1. First and foremost, **avoid panic!** Planning ahead is the best way to avoid panic. When you plan ahead, instead of feeling panicked, you are calm and serene. People tend to feed off other people's emotions. So if you are stressed, others in your life will feel that stress as well. When you need to do an important task, just start. It's usually the thought of the task that makes you procrastinate, rather than the task itself. When you avoid daily tasks, they grow from one small quick thing to what seems like a mountain of chores.

2. Create time management tools like charts, lists and schedules to help keep you more in control of your life. When you create lists or charts, keep all family

members in mind and how each one can contribute to the overall running of the home. Have a central place for the family to leave notes, get supplies, check the calendar, or access all the things they need. Use bins for each person; kids and parents included. The bins are where they can store frequently needed items, and where things can be placed for them to be put away. These bins can serve as a one-stop shop for everything they need to see, from schoolwork and mail to toys they left out.

3. **Designate work to family members.** Have a family meeting to discuss designating chores before you begin assigning them. For housework, think about, "What are the tasks only I can do?" like budgeting, bills, appointments, and "What can my children do?" like sweeping, dusting, cleaning up toys, putting clothes away, etc. Explain to your family members how much time the chore will take and what the benefits will be to them and the entire family. Have patience. It takes time to adjust to changes, and your family will need time to adjust to the new way. This is a race, my friends, not a sprint.

Use incentives when getting your family involved in home management. Not everyone will see the benefits of getting organized, so you may need to get creative with your organizing ideas and incentives. Be consistent. If there is a reward or punishment associated with their participation, make sure you follow through. Use a mitzvah chart, allowance, or working toward a specific game, toy or trip. This will help keep everyone on task. Most importantly, encourage, don't criticize.

4. **Meal planning and advance freezing** are helpful budgeting and time-management tools. When you prepare food in advance, you are doing the work once, thereby saving time and energy later when you are tired from a long day. Other benefits include weight management, portion control, healthy eating, and help in avoiding wasted food.

5. **Laundry.** We all hate you, laundry! It's never-ending and most people's least favorite chore. I personally would rather clean toilets. (I actually chose that job as a kid when we had chores.) Since you do not need to sit and watch the machine spin, it's

helpful to do laundry while other activities are taking place. Maybe use screen time to get kids involved with matching socks and folding laundry.

6. **Clean up each night before going to bed.** Have each person clear out their bin. Go through each room with your family and clean up anything that got left out or disorganized during the day. By having everyone clean their daily messes, everyone will be able to have a fresh start the next day, and your house will stay better organized. Remember, nightly clean-ups mean actually putting things where they go, not just hiding the mess.

7. **Organizing toys and clothes** with a big family means constant decluttering items that are no longer needed. Have your kids go through their toys and put aside for discarding or donating the ones that broke, and the ones they grew out of or no longer use. Doing this will help your kids find toys they have forgotten about. They will also feel good about donating their used toys to someone who will use and appreciate them. Trust me, this works and kids actually enjoy doing it. To declutter clothes, start with the oldest child. Have him or her pull out items that no longer fit or are wanted. These items can be donated or put away for the next child, and so on.

8. **Use technology** for more than homeschooling or work. There are many educational, exercise, language and craft videos one can benefit from. Friends can drink wine together and families can have playdates or story time through Zoom. Many of my professional organizing clients are moving to video organizing and coaching in order to keep the ball rolling. Personally, I have started taking an online yoga class, and I am a person who rarely exercises.

Remember: This will pass, and once it does, you will have used this time to create a new family community with shared responsibilities. When we get back to life as usual, with everyone pitching in, each of you will have more time to "stop and look around" and not let life pass you by. ■

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