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BACK TO SCHOOL TIPS FROM PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZERS AND MOMS

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For parents who have been trying to keep their youngsters occupied all summer, September often replaces Christmas as “the most wonderful time of the year!” But for those parents who don’t like rigid schedules and helping with homework, it can also translate into a time of much family stress. Either way, back to school is a time of change. Professional organizers, a growing profession nationally and in the Philadelphia region, are often called in to help families in times of transition.

As a professional organizer and a mother of three school-aged children, Debbie Lillard knows this transition all too well. Debbie Lillard started her organizing business, Space to Spare, in 2003. She is an active member of the National Association of Professional Organizers Greater Philadelphia Chapter (www.NAPO-GPC.org) and has appeared on several episodes of *HGTV's Mission Organization*. Debbie is the author of *Absolutely Organized – A Mom’s Guide to a No-Stress Schedule and a Clutter-Free Home*. ©F&W Media, 2007. Her next book, *Absolutely Organize Your Family*, is due out in June 2010 by the same publisher. Debbie’s organizing tips have been featured in such magazines as *Woman’s Day*, *Memory Makers* and *House & Home*. Lillard recommends the following tips to get families ready for the busy back-to-school season:

1. **Early to bed, early to rise** – During summer months, children tend to stay up and sleep in later. To get them back into the routine of school schedules, put the routine in place as a dry run during the last week of summer. If everyone needs to be out of the house by 8:30 am on a school day, make sure everyone has dressed, eaten and brushed their teeth by that time during your trial week.
2. **Shop for school supplies at home first** – Once you have the list of school supplies that your children need, take a look around your house first. Folders, crayons and even notebooks that are not full from the previous year can be used again. If the crayon box is broken, use a plastic container or Ziploc bag instead. Have the kids help you and make it a scavenger hunt! Check off what you *have*, then take the list to the store to purchase what you still *need*.
3. **Create file folders** – While you're shopping for those school supplies, get an extra 2-pocket folder for each child. This can be used for holding any school information that you will refer to throughout the year (i.e. school calendar, absentee notes, teacher website info, handbooks, etc.). Label each folder with a child's name and keep these in your home office for reference.
4. **Visual reminders** – Once you have all the information about your child's special classes and extra-curricular activities, put them on a chart so that each day your child knows what is happening. Kids love pictures, so use stickers or computer clip art to make your chart visually appealing and colorful. Post the chart on the refrigerator or on a centrally-located bulletin board.
5. **Designate a dumping ground** – It's been a few months, so even if you *had* a school routine you may have to review it with your kids. Physically show your children where you want them to put papers for you, homework, shoes, backpacks, and lunch boxes when they come home from school.
6. **Clear out the old to make room for new** – If you haven't done so already, clear out your child's backpack and their school papers from last year. Any special papers or artwork you want to save should be put in a scrapbook, a portfolio or a memory box. Designate one place where your child

can put papers and reports throughout the upcoming year. This could be a drawer in their desk, a plastic storage bin in their room or a large art portfolio in their closet.

7. **Layout the clothes** – If clothing is an issue with your child, make sure they know what they are allowed to wear each day to school. If mom or dad says pants and a short sleeved shirt, then let the child choose which ones. In order to do this, make sure their clothes are accessible and simply organized in drawers or a closet.
8. **Map out your activities on a family calendar** – Back to school often means “back to busy,” so map it out by writing all activities on the calendar, even before your children commit to activities. Sometimes seeing it on paper helps you realize how much running around you will be doing!
9. **Set up carpools** – Make your life easier and save on gas and time by setting up carpools with your neighbors for school, sports and after-school activities.
10. **Go through the routine with the entire family** – Every family is different, so make a morning and nighttime routine that works for you. Involve as many family members as you can to spread the work of getting everyone out the door on time with everything they need. For example, if your kids are typically waiting for lunches in the morning, then pack them the night before or make it the first thing you do in the morning.

For more tips on organization, NAPO-GPC has compiled the best tips from its members, available for free at <http://napo-gpc.org/go-event/GoEventTipsSheetColor.pdf> .

About NAPO-GPC

The non-profit Greater Philadelphia Chapter of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO-GPC) has been in existence since 1996 and has more than 90 members serving Eastern Pennsylvania, Central & Southern New Jersey, and Delaware. The Greater Philadelphia Chapter is part of the national nonprofit organization, NAPO, which has been active since 1985 and consists of more than 4,000 members throughout the United States and in eight other countries. For additional information or to find a professional organizer near you, visit the NAPO-GPC website at www.napo-gpc.org. Just click on “Find An Organizer.”

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