

PARENT TO PARENT

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Parent to Parent: Get your family organized this year

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By Betsy Flagler

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Does your home feel out of control? Start with a clean slate for the new year. No more doing everything on the fly.

Treating your home somewhat like an office can help you master the chaos, suggest Caitlin and Andrew Friedman, co-authors of "Family Inc." (Tarcher/Penguin, 2013). The couple, who met while working at a public relations company and now have 8-year-old twins,

suggest applying workplace skills to run your household, instead of letting it run you. Their tips include:

- Commit to touching base for about an hour, once a week, to map out the coming week. Bringing your children into family meetings offers many learning opportunities. While they are young, give your children their own household jobs to start teaching them responsibility.
- Have a big calendar to keep track of everything, such as the school schedule, after-school programs, birthday parties and doctors' appointments, with one person as the overseer of the calendar. Every time you book an appointment, email a reminder to yourself and add it to the calendar. As they get older, children can add their own birthday parties and after-school activities.
- Take back family time by eating dinner together at least three to four nights a week. Also, take 30 minutes of personal time before jumping into homework. For nightly downtime, play a learning game such as Scrabble or Bananagrams instead of watching television. Tackle big projects together, such as cleaning out the garage.
- Look at what really needs to get done around the house, and when – from daily to weekly to monthly to yearly. The only way to readjust who does what and strike more of a balance is to commit to changing it and start anew.
- Throw out, clear out and recycle anything that doesn't fit, work or entertain you anymore. Ask your kids to go through their toys and games and donate things they don't play with. Donate clothes you have not worn in more than a year, and do the same with duplicate tools and household items. "Be merciless. ... This is about clearing your space so you can clear your head," suggest the authors.

Charlotte Reznick, author of "The Power of Your Child's Imagination" (Perigee Trade, 2009), agrees that a new year is a good time to start fresh with your family. Whether you're working on self-improvement or helping your child follow through on goals, it's the same process. Be honest and start simple. Here are eight ideas that are easy enough for kids or adults. Start with one, make it a habit, then pick another one.

- Keep a success log: Each day, write down one way in which you felt successful or proud of yourself – even if your only victory was getting out of bed.
- Make a gratitude list: This is especially helpful for turning the tide when you're feeling low.
- Breathe slowly for two minutes: It's guaranteed to calm and center you.
- Do one kind act a day: For yourself or for another.
- Write no matter what: Grab a journal and start with three sentences. If more pours out, fine, but if not, it doesn't matter. Write from your heart.
- Draw: Express yourself. Scribble or sketch – whatever's on your mind or in your heart. Use color.
- Accept a compliment: Next time someone says something nice to you, just say, "thank you."
- Look for the good: In yourself, in your family, in any situation.

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