

AFTER



A Life More ORGANIZED

“A place for everything, and everything in its place”

One local parent found out firsthand the pleasure and relief of getting her kids' playroom under control.

BY TARA KIRKPATRICK • PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS VENEKLASEN
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I never realized that life with two young children would be such a journey of collecting stuff, especially those little prizes from fast food haunts, Disneyland, birthday parties and carnivals that become their most meaningful treasures . . . for about a day. Before I knew it, there were dozens of them taunting me from the shelves, boxes and any other place I could shove them.

I knew I needed a better system, but I didn't know where to start.

So, when my close friend, MaryLynn St. Germaine, a professional organizer, offered to help me, I jumped at the chance to clean up my life. St. Germaine, a third-generation Tucsonan, started her company, Organization by Design, after working in fundraising and non-profit development for 15 years.

In fact, organization is her passion. Ironically, born into a family of collectors, St. Germaine loved cleaning things up for her parents and neighbors as a little girl. She even designed sparkly, pink cards for her business, entitled *The Clean Way*. She has since honed her gift, learning countless smart strategies to de-clutter and de-stress people's lives.

"It creates such a feeling of calm for both the client and me when I know I've organized them in a way that corresponds with their own natural habits," she says.

"I think people fear I'm going to come in and throw everything out," St. Germaine muses. "I'll ask tough questions, but I'm never going to force someone to get rid of something if they don't want to. The goal is to simplify."

The Great Purge

"Once you've weeded out the unnecessary clutter, you're left with only those things that belong in the space. When you return items, you must put them back in a way that aligns with ▶

OPPOSITE Ashley Kirkpatrick, Anna Kirkpatrick and Ashton St. Germaine enjoy time in a newly organized playroom.

TOP RIGHT Anna and Ashley Kirkpatrick in their playroom before the organizing project took place.

BOTTOM RIGHT Professional Organizer MaryLynn St. Germaine uses labeled bins to start the organizing process.





your own natural habits, otherwise it will all be undone in no time at all,” says St. Germaine.

For my own home project, I chose the kids’ playroom. We got right to it, choosing to do the bulk of the work when the girls were in school. This is one of St. Germaine’s first tips. Let the kids help a little, but they may thwart the process if they are involved from start to finish. To ease the pain of separation, she suggests putting everything to be purged into a pile beforehand and letting the kids “rescue” three items.

St. Germaine then explains that, according to Peter Walsh from the TV series *Clean Sweep*, there are two types of clutter: “memory” clutter and “I might need it someday” clutter. “Memory clutter is the most difficult to part with,” she says. “It is often a collectible or something passed down that has an emotional or personal connection. But I try to ask my clients, ‘Do you use it? Do you love it? And does it enhance your life on a daily basis?’” If so, keep it. If not, donate it to a worthwhile charity.

“Forgive yourself the guilt of getting rid of the stuff you don’t use, understanding that someone else will truly cherish those things,” she says.

A Fresh Start

After we had pared down the mess, we grouped items into categories. For each basket, St. Germaine made a tag with a corresponding picture so the girls would recognize it when they cleaned up. She then laminated them, and I tied them onto each basket with a ribbon. I was so pleased. Our playroom was beginning to look like a *Pottery Barn Kids* catalog! “My job is to help curtail the money you spend,” she says. “The first mistake people make is to buy all sorts of organizing products before they have a vision for the space.”

Finally finished and looking around the room, with its dark wood shelving unit from IKEA, I was so excited. In some ways, my few hours with St. Germaine were better than a day at the spa. This was a whole new outlook on my life.

TOP Baskets labeled with photos and words help children learn to put their things away easily.

LEFT Keeping closets organized becomes easier with products such as laundry sorting bins.

The End Result

My girls love their new playroom, especially the baskets with pictures. They often help me clean up now and even offer to do it themselves ... sometimes. And when they don't and I have to do it, it takes me no time at all.

I even enjoy it. **HG**

Organizing Tips

Home

- Open mail near the trash or recycling bin for easy disposal of junk mail and opened envelopes, etc.
- Keep clutter in one place and try to go through it once a week.
- Make three piles when you are sorting through your stuff: Put Away, Give Away and Throw Away.
- Keep things that require attention such as RSVPs and bills separate from leisure reading, recipes and other items so that nothing will get lost.
- Turn hangers around in your closet. When you wear something put the hanger back the correct way. After six months, give away the items you don't wear.
- Store things where they are used.
- Make sure that things are clearly labeled so everyone can find them.
- Store "like with like," such as all wrapping paper in one place or all scrapbooking tools together.
- If a task takes less than two minutes, just do it right then and there.

Kids

- Use kids artwork as wrapping paper or homemade placemats.
- Keep artwork in binders.
- Keep a master calendar for the entire family with a different color of ink for each family member.

For more information, see The Source on page 90.



ABOVE MaryLynn St. Germaine (second from left) shows homeowner Tara Kirkpatrick (second from right) how to begin the purging process in the playroom. Anna Kirkpatrick (left) and Ashley Kirkpatrick (right) help as well.
LEFT MaryLynn St. Germaine in her home office.