

# Health & Safety for Caregivers

HSC-3-03



## Containing Clutter in the Home Day Care Environment

Organization, space, function, safety, and cleanliness all describe aspects of a pleasing environment for children. When features of the area are in harmony with the activities of the day and the people who live in the space, the environment will generate positive feelings (Isbell and Exelby, 2001, p. 90). Having the space well planned invites children to learn and grow. Achieving a good balance between functionality and comfort, while striving for a neat and orderly space, is always a challenge.

### Clutter Control: Why Clutter Happens

- it is unclear where items belong
- time is at a premium
- lack of organization—assigned space

When you are providing care to children, battling disorganization is a never-ending task! The first step is to plan for it.

### How to Achieve Organized Space

1. Decide what storage space you have, where it is and what will go in that area. For example, even small rooms have options for storage space. The corners could accommodate a tiered, wheeled “organizer.” A clothes basket of blocks could fit under the end table. A sweater box can hold books, blocks, or puzzles and be rolled under the couch.
2. Most clutter exists because there isn’t a home for these items. Assign everything a home and then determine the best form of storage. The storage of items determines how well they will be used. If they are easy to get to, they can be readily used. For example, if children are to have access to the items, they need to be at the child’s height. With proper storage and usage children learn the following:
  - a. Independence, because they can decide for themselves what they want to play with
  - b. Orderliness, because there is a place for every object
  - c. Responsibility, because they help care for the space by putting things away
  - d. Value of objects, because they are well cared for and organized
3. Use storage containers effectively.

Consider clear, see-through containers if you want to see what is inside, or solid containers if you want to hide the contents. Measure area before purchasing so containers fit into the allotted space. Suggested containers for home day care environments include:

- a. Plastic see-through boxes
- b. Ice cream barrels
- c. Wooden or plastic food crates that can be stacked, glued, or bolted together (wheels can be added to the bottom if desired)
- d. Heavy shoe boxes
- e. Plastic dishpans
- f. Sturdy clothes baskets

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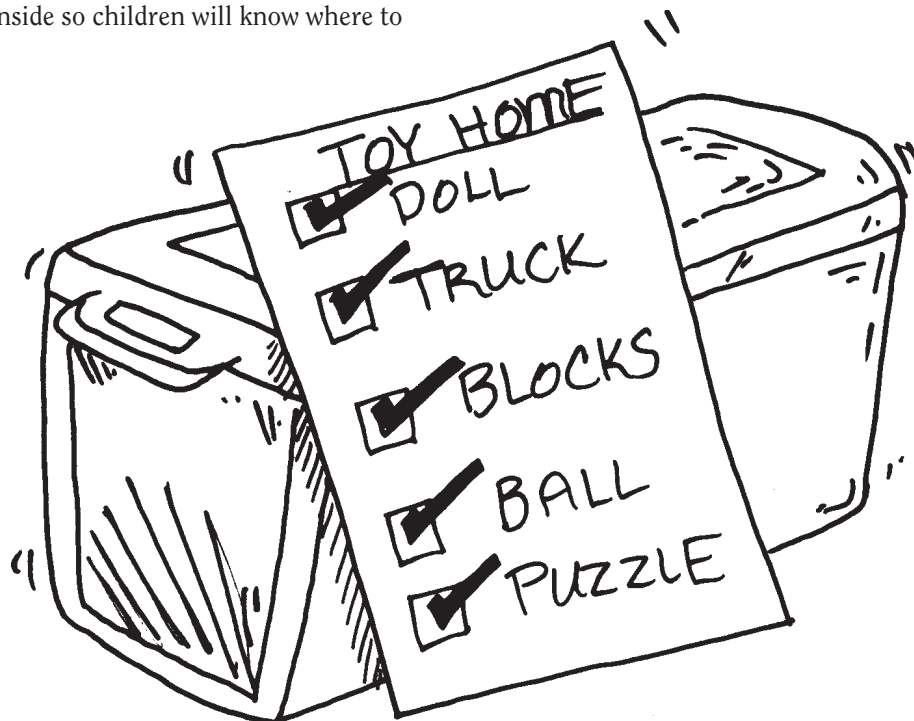


4. Clean out one storage area at a time. Make bags or boxes labeled repair, trash, donation, or storage. As you clean the area, put unneeded and unused items in these containers. Those items labeled for storage should be put in the box, dated, and stored. If you haven't needed items in the box after six to twelve months, it is probably safe to discard them.
5. Tackle one shelf at a time. Try to prevent the feeling of being overwhelmed. Get others involved. Ask children, family members, or parents to assist.
6. Stay focused on the job and area at hand. No matter how tempting, avoid the urge to wander to another shelf and start to clean it before finishing the one currently started.
7. Allow enough time to complete one small task. Set a timer five to ten minutes before you need to be finished to allow enough time for clean up.

Now that one space is organized, pat yourself on the back and set a date for tackling the next space.

## How to Maintain Organized Space

1. Make a list of where items have been located.
2. Share the information with others involved.
3. Establish a system for handling ongoing clutter. Enforce the rule that everything has a home and the object needs to be in that home unless it is being used.
4. Take before and after pictures! Strive to achieve the organized look. Use the picture as reinforcement.
5. Label storage places clearly. Use pictures of the items to label what is inside so children will know where to return them.



6. Put storage where it will be seen and used. Remember the adage, "Out of sight, out of mind."

## Remember to Organize Safely

1. Put items that are not meant for children's use in out of reach areas, possibly even locked areas. These include cleaning supplies, chemicals, plastic bags, household chemicals, toxic paint, matches, etc.
2. Keep heavy items close to the floor or table where used.
3. Use storage materials that are safe for children to be around. Check for sharp edges, protruding nails, loose screws, peeling paint, etc.

Organization is an ongoing struggle. Realizing the benefits to you and your students and following the suggestions that have been provided should help guide you through the process. Achieving the goal of an organized, functional, safe, and clean space is realistic. Take one step at a time to achieve it. The benefits will be worth it.

## References

- Dodge, D., & Colker, L. J. (2000). *The Creative Curriculum for Family Child Care*. Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House, Inc.
- Isbell, R., & Exelby, B. (2001). *Early Learning Environments That Work*. Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House, Inc.
- Morganstern, J. (1998). *Organization From the Inside Out*. NY: Henry Holt & Co.