

# Manage the Mess

Is your child's room a disaster zone? Check out these nine simple ways to get her organized.

BY SHARLENE K. JOHNSON

**U**h-oh, close call. That crumpled piece of paper you almost threw away was actually a handmade cootie catcher that your child acquired in a complex swap of valuables over the school lunch table. Rescued from its untimely demise (phew!), it now joins all the other semi junk that has been piling up in your kid's room, alongside the dust-gathering stuffed animals and toys and games she's not yet ready to say goodbye to. But it's a new decade! And as tempting as it may be to make the fast and easy resolution to keep her door closed at all times, deep in your heart you'll always know the clutter is there.

The truth of the matter is that out of sight isn't out of mind—and physical disarray can lead to mental chaos. "If there is too much going on around her, your kid may have a hard time focusing," says Bruce Henderson, Ph.D., a child psychologist at Western Carolina University, in Cullowhee, North Carolina. And then there's all that time and energy wasted looking for lost items or battling with her over cleanup chores. The good news? By ages 6 to 8, not only is your child ready to help manage her own stuff—she'll feel good about doing it. Our tips will help straighten things up.



With the right system it's bear-ly any effort at all to keep toys sorted.

## Go First

Set the stage by asking your child to help you. "Appoint her your advisor and coach," suggests Rita Emmett, author of *The Clutter-Busting Handbook*. Make a big, silly production of saying goodbye to your ratty tennis shoes as you parade them to the trash. Talk about how much you like those strappy sandals you bought for spring break back in '01 but haven't ever worn since. When it's her turn, she'll be prepped to let go.

## Start a System

You need to do the up-front work of making a place for everything: Use smaller bins for small toys, bigger bins

for large toys, and at least one catchall container for the stuff you can't anticipate. "Keep categories broad, such as action figures, animals, autos, and miscellaneous," says Sarah Buckwalter, professional organizer and founder of [theorganizingresource.com](http://theorganizingresource.com). "If you want kids to be involved in the process of getting their stuff put away, the system needs to make sense to them."

## Label It

Help your child keep things going by putting signs on bins, drawers, and shelves so that he can see at a glance where everything belongs. "The more invested he is in the process, the more

If in 2007 or Earlier You Purchased  
or Received as a Gift a New

## Mattel or Fisher-Price Toy, You May Be Entitled to a Payment from a Class Action Settlement Para una notificación en Español, visitar nuestro sitio Web, [www.mattelsettlement.com](http://www.mattelsettlement.com).

A proposed settlement has been reached in a class action lawsuit involving certain Mattel and Fisher-Price toys that were sold in the United States and subject to recalls or withdrawn from the market in 2006 and 2007. The lawsuit claims that Mattel and other companies ("Defendants") violated the law by designing, making, marketing and selling toys with excessive levels of lead, and small magnets that could become loose. Defendants deny they did anything wrong. The settlement will provide refunds to certain "Class Members" who submit "Claim Forms." If you're a Class Member, you may send in a Claim Form to get a refund in the form of a check or voucher. **Claim Forms can be obtained at [www.mattelsettlement.com](http://www.mattelsettlement.com) or by calling 1-888-955-2715.** A federal court authorized this notice.

**Am I a Class Member?** You're a Class Member if you purchased or acquired (including by gift) either: (1) a toy subject to a Mattel recall on 11/21/06, 8/2/07, 8/14/07, 9/4/07, or 10/25/07; or (2) certain blood pressure monitor cuffs in toy medical kits (collectively called the "Recalled Toys"). To see if a toy you bought or received as a gift may be a recalled toy, go to [www.mattelsettlement.com](http://www.mattelsettlement.com) and review "Exhibit A" for a list of affected product names and numbers or follow the online claims process.

**What Does the Settlement Provide?** In addition to refunds for Class Members, Mattel agreed to reimburse Class Members who incurred out-of-pocket costs for lead testing of a child as a result of his/her exposure to a Recalled Toy within 6 weeks of the Recall announcement. Mattel also agreed to implement and maintain a toy safety program for three years, and to donate \$275,000 to the National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions.

**What Are My Options?** To ask for a payment, you must mail a Claim Form or submit it online at [www.mattelsettlement.com](http://www.mattelsettlement.com) by **May 29, 2010**. If you don't wish to be in the settlement, exclude yourself from the Settlement Class by **February 22, 2010**. Or stay in and object to the settlement by **February 22, 2010**. **If you do not exclude yourself, you will be bound by the Court's Order, but individual personal injury claims are not released.** Visit [www.mattelsettlement.com](http://www.mattelsettlement.com) or call 1-888-955-2715 for more details about the settlement, your rights, and how to file a Claim Form for a payment.

The Court will hold a hearing at 1:30 p.m. on **March 15, 2010** to consider whether to approve the settlement, and whether to grant Co-Lead Counsel's request for \$12.9 million in attorneys' fees and expenses, to which Mattel does not object. You don't have to attend the hearing. **Please do not contact the Court directly.**

**For more information, go to:  
[WWW.MATTELSETTLEMENT.COM](http://WWW.MATTELSETTLEMENT.COM)  
OR CALL 1-888-955-2715  
CLAIM FORMS MUST BE POSTMARKED  
OR SUBMITTED ONLINE BY MAY 29, 2010.**

as they grow 6-8 YEARS

likely he'll be to put the socks where the socks go," says Emmett. He can write or draw the labels, or you can take snapshots while he hams it up with, say, a dinosaur from the animal bin or a pile of T-shirts from his dresser. Print the photos and stick them on the appropriate container.

## Schedule a Periodic Purge

Instead of waiting until the clutter is out of control, designate a "Shed Stuff Day" on your family's calendar when the seasons change, for instance, and before birthdays or other occasions when gifts are given. A kid who's anticipating getting new presents may be more inclined to give up some old ones. But you should also try to have a quick-fire session once a week: Set a timer for 15 minutes and see who can throw out the most or make their space tidiest. If you join in the competition, all your stuff will get more organized too.

## Give It Away Together

"Kids naturally like the idea that their things are going to another child who needs them," says Buckwalter. Help your child connect with a local charity, such as a foster-care program, and

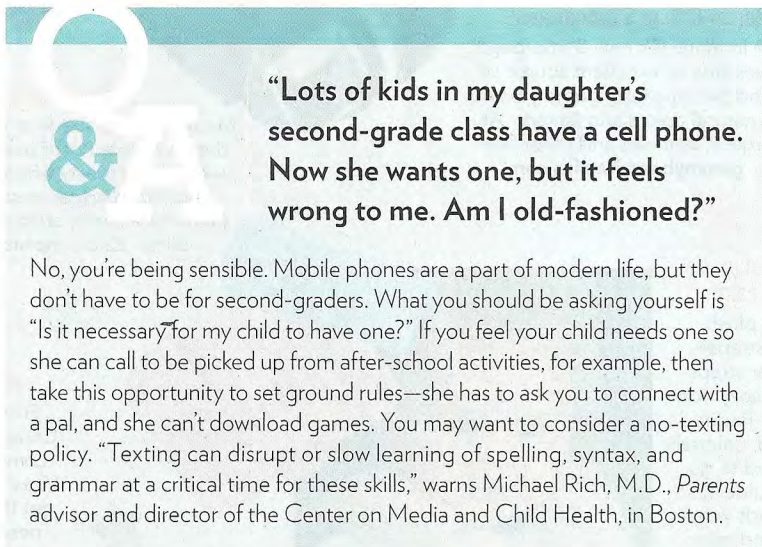
make an event out of cleaning and sorting the items she's decided to donate. Take her with you for the delivery, and discuss the joy that her nice, clean toys will bring to another child who may have very little.

## Rotate

If your child still has more toys than places to put them, try stashing a batch in the garage or the basement. Exchange the stored toys for another set a few weeks later, and everything will seem new and exciting again. Novelty aside, when kids aren't overwhelmed with objects, they appreciate their possessions much more and take better care of them," says Dr. Henderson.

## Prevent Pileups

Instead of promising your child new things as an incentive for good behavior or grades, offer him something like a special one-on-one outing with you or your spouse instead. While you're at it, you might even want to promote the "birthdays are about the fun, not the presents" message. Throw a party with a fun activity (think soccer match, bike parade, or cookie decorating), and ask guests to bring a toy to donate instead. While a present-free party can be a tough sell for a 7-year-old, he'll still get



**"Lots of kids in my daughter's second-grade class have a cell phone. Now she wants one, but it feels wrong to me. Am I old-fashioned?"**

No, you're being sensible. Mobile phones are a part of modern life, but they don't have to be for second-graders. What you should be asking yourself is "Is it necessary for my child to have one?" If you feel your child needs one so she can call to be picked up from after-school activities, for example, then take this opportunity to set ground rules—she has to ask you to connect with a pal, and she can't download games. You may want to consider a no-texting policy. "Texting can disrupt or slow learning of spelling, syntax, and grammar at a critical time for these skills," warns Michael Rich, M.D., *Parents* advisor and director of the Center on Media and Child Health, in Boston.