

Get Organized! Expert helps kids — and parents — get it together

By [Lauren Daley](#)

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

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Moms and Dads, Carolyn Dalgliesh knows what stresses you out:

Getting your kids up and out in the morning, getting them off to activities in the afternoon and getting them to do their homework and night.

That's why Dalgliesh — a mother of two from North Kingston, R.I. — founded Simple Organizing Strategies (SOS) to provide expert support and guidance for anyone who wants to develop an efficient, healthy, and streamlined living environment.

A former sales manager for Fortune 500 companies, Dalgliesh also founded Systems for Sensory Kids (SSK) to help parents of kids with sensory processing disorders— such as anxiety, hyperactivity, obsessive compulsive disorder or attention deficit disorder.

"I've always been very organized. And I've always had an interest helping people break their lives down into manageable pieces," said Dalgliesh, who gave a free organization seminar at Friends Academy in Dartmouth last week.

So if you're the parent who has to check the fridge, the bulletin board and the computer to see when Alex has soccer, when Lexi has ballet, who has a science project due when, and what time Tommy's orthodontist appointment was rescheduled to — well, Dalgliesh has some tips for you.

First step: Have a central message area for your family — whether that's a white board in the hallway, or a bulletin board in the kitchen.

"It's like one-stop-shopping for everyone's schedule," Dalgliesh said.

Next, take a good look at your children's schedules to make sure there's not too much going on:

"Be aware of how much is going on at your child's school. Have a clear idea for what is a good number of after-school activities before it gets to be too much. For elementary school kids, one to two activities a week is the most that they can handle," Dalgliesh said.

"It's good to have after-school activities, but make sure you have at least one afternoon of just staying home and relaxing," she advised. "You don't want kids to feel like they're constantly on the go."

As for managing homework, don't send your kids up to their rooms, where Internet, TV and cell phones are available distractions.

"Have a homework station downstairs, next to a parent," said Dalgliesh.

You should also use weekly planners and organizers to more easily see when assignments are due, when tests are scheduled, etc.

"Make sure you sit with your kids at least once a week and make a plan for the week," Dalglish said. "Take a look at what's due, and ask your child, 'How are we going to get this done?'"

If your child is having trouble finishing his or her homework, Dalglish said to ask yourself:

"Is he having a hard time because he's distracted at home? Or is he having a hard time with the subject itself?"

For kids with ADD or ADHD, cleaning their rooms or organizing their backpacks may prove difficult.

"You need to break down the task into steps. For kids with ADD, the path needs to be simple," said Dalglish, whose 7-year-old son has sensory issues.

"For example, if you want your ADD child to organize the bookshelf in their room, have a picture of a clean bookshelf with steps on how to clean it written on the back. Then when the child gets distracted, they see the card and think 'Oh yeah, that's what I'm doing.'"

Dalglish said "sensory kids — like those with anxiety disorder, sensory integration dysfunction, learning challenges, ADD/ADHD, obsessive/compulsive disorder, high-functioning autism, Asperger's syndrome, or other sensory challenges — often look at the world through a different lens. It can be challenging to connect with them, and little things can often turn into major stress points."

Dalglish often speaks at elementary schools and middle schools throughout Massachusetts and Rhode Island. She is also available for in-home consultations, which involve a room-by-room assessment to provide a game plan for creating "sensory zones" throughout your home.

For more information, visit www.simpleorganizingstrategies.com or www.systemsforsensorykids.com. To schedule a consultation, call (401) 413-2811 or e-mail carolyn@systemsforsensorykids.com.

Lauren Daley is a freelance writer. Contact her at ldaley33@gmail.com.

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