The Organized Family: Scheduling And Time Management At Home

Trying to coordinate your family's schedule can seem like a monumental task. Work responsibilities for mom and dad, extracurricular activities for the kids, trying to fit in chores and family time – how can you possibly manage it with only 24 hours in the day? All it takes is a little advance planning!

Set Up a Family Calendar

There is really only one way to avoid scheduling conflicts and last minute scrambles – and that is to set up a "family calendar." Hang a large wall calendar in a high-traffic area of the house (kitchen seems to work well, because everyone goes there daily). Label each family member's activities in a different color (Susie in blue, Jimmy in orange, mom in green, dad in red) for easy recognition. Then take a second to record every single upcoming activity for each person in the family – meetings, social engagements, sporting events, doctor appointments, you name it. Every time someone brings home an invitation to a party or permission slip for a field trip, write it down. Every time the school sends out a calendar of upcoming days off, transfer it to the family calendar. When your boss asks if you can work late or your child's piano teacher wants to switch from Tuesday to Wednesday, change the calendar. Get in the habit of putting EVERYTHING related to your family's schedule in one place. To get started, try out the Smead Organomics Family Calendar.

Get On the Same Page

The next step is to block off a regular weekly meeting with the entire family to go over your upcoming schedule. Take a look at any activities occurring within the next couple of weeks – address conflicts (ex: mom's got to work late and Johnny needs a ride home from the game, so he should make plans to go with a friend), decide on any shopping trips you need for supplies (so you can bake cupcakes for the school party or get Jimmy's diorama put together), and add the week's chores to the calendar. If you carry a personal planner or PDA, this is also the time to update your portable calendar with the current info (it doesn't do you much good to plan out the week if you can't see the schedule while you're out of the house!) Your stress level will drop by a factor of ten, just having each person's to-do's and responsibilities written down in one visible place.

Get Ready The Night Before (Or Sooner!)

Now that you have your schedule in order, you need to work on your daily routines. Getting ready in the morning is much easier if you start working on it the night before. Have your children spend 15 minutes before they go to bed packing everything they need for school into their book bags. Ask each person to pick out the clothes they plan to wear the next day and lay them out on a chair. Make everyone's lunches in advance and store them in the refrigerator overnight. Also consider setting up a "launching pad" – a table, chair, basket, or other container located near the door where each person can put the supplies they will need the next day. If your kids can never seem to remember what they need for school, create a standard checklist for them – homework, band instrument, gym clothes, sports equipment, supplies for any extracurricular activities, library books, whatever. You can even make a note of where they tend to leave things if that helps – "Gym Clothes: check the laundry basket." The goal is to have everything in one place when it comes time to hit the road.