

organizers' challenge

What are your biggest organizing challenges? That's what I asked everyone I know. Guess what? We're facing similar issues: too much paper and too much of something else, be it clothes, shoes, magazines. I asked members of the Professional Organizers in Canada to weigh in on two hypothetical cases. The solutions offered by **Jane Veldhoven** of Get Organized! Professional Services in Halifax, and **Janis Nylund** of Orderly Concepts & Solutions in Surrey, B.C., are straightforward and easy to implement. By Kathleen Dore



CASE 1: PAPER, PAPER EVERYWHERE

Andrea and Jim work full time. Each night, Andrea picks up Jack, 10, and Rachel, 8, walks in the door, puts the mail on the kitchen counter and starts dinner. Later, once the kids are in bed, Jim takes the bills and leaves the rest unopened for Andrea, who is busy catching up on office work. Since there's nothing urgent, Andrea then puts everything in a bag labelled "To Be Opened" to be dealt with on the weekend. But between sports, shopping and housecleaning, only some of the mail gets processed. The rest is either tossed, put into a "To Be Filed" plastic bag or left in the "To Be Opened" bag.

Some mornings, as everyone rushes for school or work, the children pull out forms that need immediate attention. Andrea has tried hanging a folder labelled "School Forms" on the kitchen wall, but the kids don't remember to put papers there, and she doesn't always remember to remind them.

Some of the unopened mail causes real problems, but mostly the situation results in feelings of guilt and inadequacy for Andrea as mail and magazines multiply.

"Andrea and Jim are the typical family of today: two jobs, two children, too much to do," says Jane.

"Andrea and Jim can't do it all," says Janis. "They can, however, set up systems and delegate tasks."

the system

- Set up a central desk/office area in the kitchen or adjoining family room with six baskets (or slots, wall pockets, a desktop

and "File." Also include an attractive paper-recycling container. (If you don't bring mail into the kitchen or desk area right away, create a "landing zone" near the door, which could be something simple like a basket for mail. Place a basket in the living room for magazines.)

- Organize a household file system in the kitchen if you have space; otherwise, use a separate room.
- Hang a decorative whiteboard or blackboard/bulletin board in the kitchen for messages, coupons, invitations, the family calendar and grocery lists. Coupons can also go in a separate drawer if you collect a lot of them.

how it works

- Upon coming home, Andrea puts mail into the "In" slot. While she starts dinner, the children check for any school notices and forms, which go into the "Act" basket.
- Jim opens everything, tossing all envelopes and junk mail. "If you put mail back in the envelope, you're making extra work," says Jane. Jim sorts what's left into "Pay," "Read," "Act" or "File" categories, so Andrea can immediately see what needs to be done. Jim takes care of the "Pay" basket, marks bills paid and puts them into the "File" basket.
- Andrea takes 15 to 30 minutes each evening, preferably while the children do homework or before she starts her office work, to deal with mail. "Her biggest mistake is putting everything into bags to deal with later," says Jane. "It becomes out of sight, out of mind, and after only one