

Expert Q&A

Q. Our playroom is a mess. You name it, and it's all over the floor: video games, board games, art supplies, etc. How can I arrange everything so the kids can keep the room tidy?

A. For starters, this is a project that you and your children should undertake together. Involving your kids is the key to both short-term and long-term success.

First, identify the activities that take place in the room and gather up all the items relating to each one. Decide what to keep, give away, put elsewhere or toss. Then, think kindergarten classroom: Create stations for arts and crafts, dress-up, reading, toys and games. Use as much low shelving as possible so items are stored in plain view for easy retrieval.

Now, the fun part: putting it all away. Be creative. There is no such thing as the "perfect" container, except the one that serves your needs and reflects your taste and budget. Use size-appropriate containers -- such as shoe boxes for tiny toys like matchbox cars, and larger containers for blocks, trucks and balls. Then add labels (words or pictures) to remind the kids where everything goes -- without your supervision. Your children's participation in the process will lead to their investment in keeping the room neat and organized long after the initial work is done.

Ann Sullivan is the author of Organizing for Life: The Kids Room.