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ORGANIZING YOUR CHILD'S PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Here are some practical ways you *can* organize your home to make it a source of stress.

RELIEF FOR CHILDREN:

1. Make sure your child has some personal space. Whether children enjoy a private bedroom or share a cubbyhole with three siblings, they should have at least one area to call their own- a place where they can relax, retreat, and recover from stress. If space is limited, consider putting a "tent" over the child's bed or even putting a beanbag chair and a light in the closet.
2. Help your child organize. Many children live in physical chaos because they don't know to organize their belongings. Provide shelves, boxes, pegboards, and hooks. Help your child sort through! Belongings, and establish a "home" for everything. Periodically weed out toys and clothes that have been outgrown or in which the child has lost interest so as to reduce clutter.
3. Tailor the physical environment to your child's size. Is there a hook in the bathroom low enough for his robe? Is there a stepstool next to the sink? *Can* he reach the pole in the closet? A child learns to feel competent (and less stress) when he is able to handle simple chores alone. Organize your home environment to make this possible.
4. Make and enforce rules about keeping the house physically stress-free. Establish an acceptable level (a stress threshold) of dirt and clutter, and see that the family works together to keep the home below that level. The specifics will vary from family to family even room to room, but be sure everyone has a say in the division. Establish standards that everyone can live by.
5. Lower the noise level! Noise can contribute significantly to a stressful environment. Take a minute to monitor the decibel level in the house. Is the dishwasher, stereo, television, and Dad's hand drill blasting all at the same time? If you can bring the volume down, everyone in the family will be less stressed.
6. Establish comfortable traffic patterns. Is the furniture in such a way that people feel comfortable, and don't get in each other's way? Is it possible to become *so* used to a certain arrangement that we are not aware of how much stress it causes?
7. Try to make your home appealing. Again, the specifics will vary with taste. But you don't have to be *an* interior decorator to make a room cheerful, appealing and restful. When choosing colors, be aware that certain colors are more stimulating than others. If the stress levels in your home *are* high, you want to choose colors such as blue, pale green or light pink.

EIGHT WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM

1. Make sure your children know that they are worthy just because they exist. Make it clear that whether they are competent or outstanding in other ways makes no difference in your love for them.
2. Be alert to evidence of low self-esteem. Remember that healthy self-esteem is not the same as pride. It is just honest acceptance of whom one is. A child who needs to revel in his accomplishments probably has low self-esteem.
3. Help your child build *an* honest self-image. Ignoring your child's weaknesses is not helpful, but don't judge them. Children must learn to accept their shortcomings, but also value their strengths.
4. Help your child discover his unique talents. No two children *are* alike. Each has something special to contribute to life. Giving your child the opportunity to explore many activities and interests can uncover abilities and gifts they *never* thought about.
5. Provide an atmosphere of trust in your home. Children who can trust their emotions to the intimacy of the family and talk about love, disappointments, accomplishments or failures, *are* rich indeed. They will have few problems with self-esteem.
6. Make sure that the image you mirror back to your child is not distorted by you' own desires or disappointments. Remember that to a large extent children see themselves through the "mirror" of how their parents see them. It is easy to give the message that your child doesn't measure up to your standards. Polish those mirrors! Make sure they *are* not distorted by your own agenda.
7. Cherish everything about your child, not just the special or outstanding things. Emphasize the positive values of every little inadequacy and lavish praise for your child's strengths.
8. Make it safe for your child to be whoever he is. You do this by showing love and forgiveness no matter what your child does. By all means discipline your child, but never use discipline as a form of revenge. Children *are* remarkably fair-minded. Don't abuse their trust.