

# Toys more fun when they can find them

By Iowa News Service  
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Play rooms are great. If your kids can manage to push aside layers of Legos, dolls, cars, dress-up clothes and puzzle pieces to find a square foot of floor space on which to actually play.

Every parent knows the frustration of feeling overrun with their children's toys. But it doesn't have to be that way, say area professional organizers.

"The rule I have is one in, one out," says Maggie Jackson, owner of Cedar Rapids-based The Organized Life. Also, "Never buy something that has a million pieces."

Since her son Will was 4 or 5 years old he's learned to trade a new toy for one that he no longer plays with.

Jackson and Becky Esker, owner of Get Organized in Cedar Rapids, also tell clients not to buy anything – including toys – if they don't have space for it.

"Before I put it in my shopping cart, I figure out where I'm going to put it," says Esker. And the answer can't be shoved in a closet. The key to curbing toy clutter is having a clearly identified place for everything.

"Nothing's worse than having a big huge container with all the toys in it because they can't find



Young Will Jackson is a collector who's been trained in the fine art of staying organized.

Iowa News Service photo

anything and then they dump it out," says Esker.

Group like things with like so kids know immediately where an item belongs. "The more steps it takes to do something the less likely they are to do that," says Esker.

Will Jackson is a collector. So, in his room he has a dozen or so small plastic containers filled with his collections. There's a box for key chains,

one for rocks, sports figurines, necklaces, etc.

He helped make labels for each box with a label maker. Younger kids can help label containers by cutting out pictures from magazines or catalogs or drawing their own.

"It makes it into a game," says Esker.

■ Turn to page 65: Kids organize



A place for everything and everything in its place makes sense for kids' toys and collections and ensures they'll be able to find them easily.

■ From page 64: Kids organize

Once bins are labeled, store them according to how often the child plays with the items inside. Something that's rarely played with can be stored high in a closet. Favorite toys should be more accessible, at a height they can easily reach.

Make cleaning up easy by taking pictures of the room as it should look when everything is put away. Blow up the pictures and post them on the wall.

That way kids know what "Mommy means when she says, 'Clean your room'" Esker explains. "They can't put it away if they don't know where it goes. Will they always do it? No. Because they're kids. But we don't give up."



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