

Managing Single Motherhood

Judy Stein* knew she needed help the time she dropped her son, Kevin*, at practice and found her self confronted by another seven-year-old.

"Why is Kevin always late?" the pint-size first grader demanded to know.

What's worse, Judy knew the question was justified.

It was one of the wake-up calls that brought her to Sandy Maynard, **ADDitude's Coach on Call**. Since Judy's recent divorce, she couldn't keep her own schedule, belongings or finances in order. About to move from an apartment to a nearby townhouse, she wanted to make a fresh start.

While single, Judy struggled with AD/HD but managed her limited personal responsibilities adequately. Later, her husband picked up the slack when she couldn't always juggle childcare, work, and household chores. Only after the divorce did things fall apart as Judy couldn't devise a workable structure for life as a single parent. Bills went unpaid, appointments were missed, school permission slips never got signed. Kevin was sinking too.

"Even without AD/HD, many single moms are pressed for time when it comes to their attention," says Maynard, who identified three key strategies that could help the rest of Judy's life fall into place.

Confine The Clutter

First, Maynard studied the way Judy navigated her home. "I'd be doing one thing, need something else, go to another room to get it, and get distracted. Things never got finished," Judy recalls. "The bills were in one room, the stamps were somewhere else. I couldn't find things and I felt out of control."

Maynard's solution: designate a spare bedroom in Judy's new house for "work and work only." Even if she couldn't keep the space perfectly organized, her searches would be confined.

"This is where I keep my canceled checks, the mail, my stationary, my tools," Judy now says proudly of her new work area. "If Kevin needs the tag cut out of her pajamas, I know where the scissors are."

For people without spare rooms, Maynard says, designate a wall unit or other well delineated space for storing all the accouterments of daily life.

Make Things Perfectly Clear

"Judy is a visual person," says Maynard. "For her, it's 'out of sight, out of mind.'"

How to keep things in sight without chaos? Maynard hung a bulletin board by Judy's desk for important daily reminders. Then she bought clear holders and containers for everything else.

Clear plastic mini-chests with drawers and files hold Judy's tools, stationary, stamps, checks, computer discs and other supplies. She can see exactly where things are when she needs them.

Clear plastic envelopes divide Judy's current affairs into three: **To Do** (unpaid bills, permission slips, applications); **To Read** (articles, catalogs, books); and **Special Interest** (paperwork related to her move, new home, travel brochures). Judy can grab any folder to take to work, on vacation, or elsewhere.

Clear purses and backpacks help Judy and Kevin keep track of homework, pencils, keys, correspondence from school, checkbooks and other belongings that often disappear in cloth or leather bags.

Color Your Calendar

Maynard created a calendar system to fit Judy's visual style.

Color coding helps Judy keep up with regular appointments and tasks: yellow for the days Kevin spends at Dad's, purple for school meetings and events, green for the days she needs a babysitter, and three different colors to identify her rotating workplace – one of three dental offices where she's a hygienist.

Format is equally important. "Some people need to see the whole month, and others can't deal with any more than a week," Maynard says. "Some need to see things top to bottom; for others left to right works better." You're more likely to keep a calendar and stick to it by experimenting to find the format suits you best.

As for Judy, everything Maynard suggested suits her just fine, though she admits her continuing challenge is to return things to their place. "You have to make yourself do things," she says. "When the mail comes in, I try to carry it up to the office right away. It's still difficult, but by defining my space I helped define my life. It helps me feel more grounded and gives me time to take better care of Kevin and myself."