



Get organized for school – how to prevent the bottomless backpack

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Teach your child that her backpack is a tool for transport, not a storage container.
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Your child's backpack is a handy container to get school supplies from home to school and back each day, but it can easily become a bottomless pit where assignments and possessions go in but are never seen again. Help your child organize her backpack - and her habits - so that she can find what she needs when she needs it:

1. **Use a backpack as a container for transporting school supplies** back and forth, not as a storage bag. Teach your child to use her backpack in concert with her school locker and home study space to keep school materials organized and ready for use.
2. To encourage use only as a container to carry school supplies, **choose a backpack with your child that's only large enough for the books and supplies she'll need for one day.** It should not be large enough for everything in her locker. Choose a backpack with only a few pockets - the more pockets, the more places to lose items. Link to [Press Connects](#) for guidelines for selecting a backpack that keep your child's health in mind.
3. **Help your child develop the habit of emptying her backpack every day.** Make organizing it part of a routine, just like homework. Shortly after she arrives home, have her empty the backpack on a desk, table, or bed so that all items are visible. Sort items using the keep-act-toss system: "keep" items to file at home, "act" items for homework or parent signature, "toss" items that are out of date or no longer useful.
4. **Set up a filing system with your child at home for school papers,** creating folders for each subject, and filing papers from oldest to most recent. Create a similar system of spiral notebooks with pockets for each subject, or a binder with sections for each subject. To minimize weight and clutter, the binder should only be large enough for about week's worth of notes, assignments, and other papers. Older papers may be filed at home and eventually discarded when no longer useful (for example, after the final test in a subject).
5. **Create a checklist of supplies and materials that should be in the backpack,** and keep the checklist in one pocket of a two-pocket folder with your child's class schedule in the other pocket. Help her make a habit of storing items in the same place in the backpack each time, and contain small, loose items in small zipper pouches to minimize clutter.
6. Each evening after homework is complete, **help your child form a habit of sorting items for the next day's classes and repacking her backpack.** The bag will be ready to go in the morning as part of her "get ready for school" routine: get up, clean up, get dressed, eat breakfast, put on outerwear (jacket, sweater), pick up lunch and backpack, leave for school.
7. It may take a few weeks to work out the kinks in the system, so **form these habits early** and make periodic adjustments to find a system that works for you and your child.

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