

ORGANIZATION

What Is This Developmental Skill?

Organization is the ability to keep track of belongings, arrange materials, remember where items belong, and prepare for upcoming activities. It relies on attention, working memory, planning, categorization, and repeated experience with predictable environments.

How Does This Normally Develop?

Young children depend on adults to organize their surroundings. Caregivers create designated places for toys, clothing, school materials, and personal items. Through modeling, reminders, and repeated routines, children gradually learn how to put things away, gather needed materials, and maintain order.

Organization develops slowly and continues improving throughout childhood and adolescence.

How Can Neglect Interfere With Its Development?

Children raised in chaotic or unstable homes may not have experienced consistent places for belongings or predictable household routines. Possessions may have been lost, discarded, taken by others, or left behind during sudden moves. As a result, the child may not understand how organizational systems work or may feel anxious about putting valued items away.

Executive functioning difficulties related to chronic stress can further interfere with planning and memory.

What Might This Look Like?

The child may:

- Frequently lose clothing, toys, or school materials.
- Leave belongings throughout the home.
- Stuff items into drawers, backpacks, or closets.
- Become overwhelmed when asked to clean a room.
- Forget what is needed for school or activities.
- Carry many possessions from place to place.
- Become distressed when someone moves or discards an item.

Parenting Implications

Caregivers should provide simple organizational systems with clearly labeled spaces. Large tasks should be broken into small steps, such as placing dirty clothing in a hamper before organizing toys. Photographs, labels, baskets, and checklists can reduce memory demands.

The goal is not perfect neatness. The goal is helping the child experience the environment as understandable and manageable.

From Understanding to Attunement

Disorganization may reflect a lack of learned structure rather than refusal to cooperate.

An attuned response might be: "This feels like a lot to figure out. Let's start with one kind of item and decide where it belongs."