

Real Solutions is a periodic newsletter produced by Susan Stewart designed to provide practical organization tips to simplify your life.

Managing Dinnertime Madness

It is 5:00 pm and Cindy has no idea what to make for dinner. In the process of searching through the freezer, she causes an avalanche of frozen foods to fall to the floor. Meanwhile, her hungry baby is crying and the phone is ringing.

After checking the Caller ID to see it's another sales call, she grabs a cookbook to search through as she feeds Zachary. Cindy starts flipping through recipes trying to find something she can throw together in a hurry. Bingo! Here's something quick and easy.

The hunt through the pantry for recipe ingredients begins. Her pantry is in such a state of chaos that the process takes twice as long as she had thought and she realizes she does not have a can of tomatoes. The door bell rings. Forcing a smile on her face, she answers the door and finds a neighbor child asking if Nicole can come out and play. She sends Nicole out the door asking her to run to the neighbors to see if they have a can of tomatoes to borrow.

Meanwhile, Cindy decides to start the recipe but can't find an inch of counter space to cook on. The mail, school papers and dirty dishes are scattered everywhere. Nicole returns from the neighbors having had no luck finding a can of tomatoes. By now it is 6:00 pm. and Mike will be home shortly. Defeated, Cindy picks up the phone and orders pizza, again.



It's 6:30 am and as Tracy waits for her coffee to brew, she glances at her menu on the fridge and relaxes, knowing that she bought all the week's ingredients on her Monday morning grocery run. She pulls the cooked ground beef out of the freezer and begins unloading the dishwasher so the rest of the family can load their own dirty dishes.

At 3:30 pm, Tracy returns from picking up Brook at school. She sorts the mail before feeding the baby and sends Brook to the front door with the red light sign signaling the neighbor kids, "Do Not Disturb."

Next, Tracy talks with Brook about her day while going through her folder of papers. The phone rings but Tracy lets the machine answer. Tracy signs any papers she needs and delights in her daughters progress before throwing out unneeded papers.

Brook gets her homework and sits at the counter while Brandon joins her with a coloring book. Tracy wipes down the counters and prepares everything needed for tonight's meal. When homework is finished, Tracy gets the older kids started on their chores and finishes her recipe. Tracy then cleans up the dishes and puts dinner in the oven. Taking the timer with her, she puts the baby in the stroller and takes the kids on a short walk to the park.

With 10 minutes left on the timer, Tracy and the kids head home and run into dad pulling in the drive. At 6:15 they all sit down to have a meal together.

For great meal-planning tips, turn to page 2!

real solutions for real life • Managing Mealtime

- Plan your menu at least one month in advance. It will save time and headaches!
- Start typing family recipes into your computer on a database.
- Making a grocery list becomes much easier using the cut and paste feature on the computer and it is easier to find than hunting through cookbooks or recipe holders.
- Run the dishwasher after dinner or at night so it can be unloaded before bed or first thing in the morning.
- Pull frozen meat out of the freezer and place in refrigerator first thing in the morning.
- Organize your freezer so you don't spend time searching for that frozen piece of meat.
- Brown ground beef needed for the week all at once to save on dishes and time. Once browned, ground beef can be frozen again in containers (2 3/4 c. browned ground beef is equal to 1 pound).
- If cooked chicken is needed for casseroles, boil chicken needed for the week all at once, chop and freeze.
- Have a place to sort and store mail so it stays off the counter.
- Create a sign such as a red light/green light system that tells neighbor kids when it is and is not OK to ring the doorbell.
- Just because the phone is ringing, doesn't mean you have to answer it. Let the machine answer and call back at your convenience.
- Designate labeled hooks low enough for the kids to reach for hanging jackets and backpacks. The closer to the door they usually enter, the better.
- Have older kids help with setting the table as part of their chores.
- Use paper plates on hectic days or even ordinary days to save on clean up time.
- Keep like ingredients in the same place. For example: Keep bottled sauces such as vinegar and soy together.
- Alphabetize your spices for easier retrieval.



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