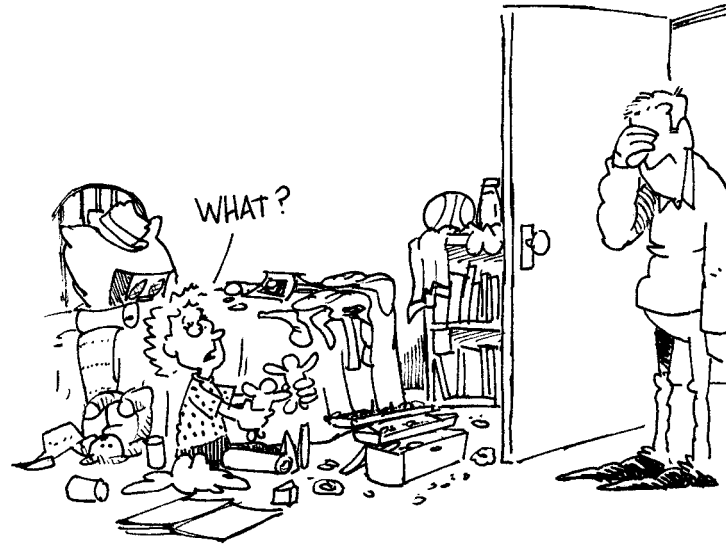


## Maintaining Harmony at Home

Alexandra “Allie” Golon



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There’s no doubt about it, life with visual-spatial learners (or what I call “topsy-turvy kids”) particularly if you are an auditory-sequential parent, can be challenging. They have no sense of time, so you’re generally late getting out the door. Their organizational skills are lacking, or at best questionable, so you feel as though you are living in a giant collection of STUFF all of the time. They tend to become easily distracted, so chores and homework assignments are often not completed according to a teacher’s or parent’s time schedule, which can result in significant tension. So, how do you maintain harmony?

### **Housekeeping--it’s not just a job, it’s an adventure**

How effectively are you communicating with your child? Imagine it’s time for the weekly (monthly?) Clean-Your-Bedroom-Or-Else Ritual. Do you typically rattle off a list of do-this, do-that chores then leave the room believing that your “picture” of a clean living space will somehow manifest itself out of the reigning chaos? And, that it will do

so within a prescribed timeframe? Now think about your success rate with this approach. (Not great, I'm guessing!) Next time, try this: work with your child to create a poster or chart of pictures (e.g., drawings you create together, clip art from the computer, photographs or clippings from magazines, etc.) of what the end product, the Never-Been-Seen-Since-We-Moved-In-Bedroom, *should* look like when the job is finished. The pictures might include one of a nicely made bed with all the stuffed animals aligned. Another picture could show folded clothes neatly tucked into drawers that are still within the dresser, while another picture might show matching shoes lined up nicely on the floor of the closet. Yet another image of similar toys gathered carefully into tubs ... Ok, you get the picture. *Now help them get the picture.*

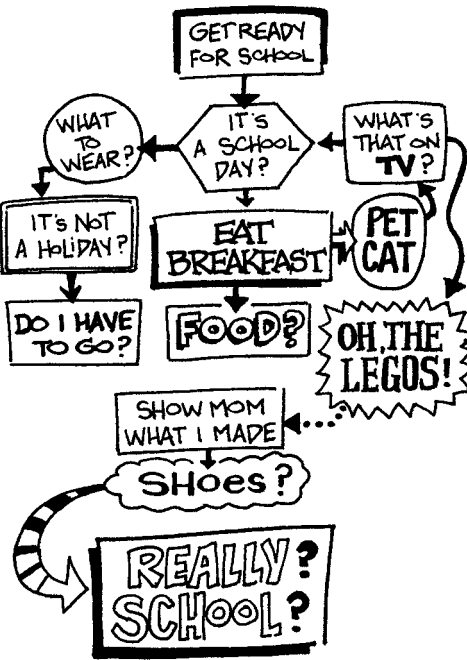
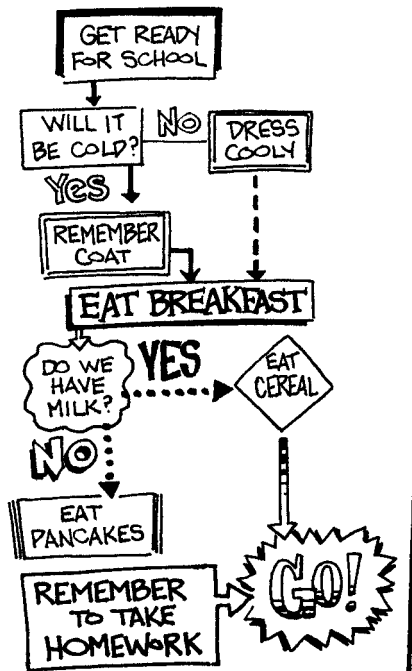
One clever mother shared with me that after she and her daughter were successful in creating a perfectly clean and orderly bedroom that both parent and child could live with, they took a photo of it to use as a reminder of the goal the next time the bedroom got out of hand.

I believe all children, not just visual-spatial learners, should be involved in helping to maintain the home from an early age. Not only because scrubbing floors and the ability to do one's own laundry are strong life skills, but because actually participating in the dusting, vacuuming, dishwashing and so on, develops a sense of pride and ownership. I've seen with my children that they are more likely to keep a floor clutter-free or a kitchen table cleared if they were involved in restoring it to a cleaner state in the first place. There's nothing like securing an image of what the table, room or floor should look like than to participate in getting it to that condition!

Getting them out the door—with their shoes!

**Auditory-Sequential  
Learner**

**Visual-Spatial  
Learner**



Getting a visual-spatial child out the door can be a daily challenge. There are so many distracting and more entertaining options available. One technique that works, at least some of the time, is to create a mental picture of the consequences of not getting to your destination on time. For example, suppose you are running late to an afternoon sports practice. You could create the following picture for your child: “If we are late for your practice, that will upset the coach and possibly interrupt the start of the practice for all the other kids who arrived on time. How do think your coach will feel? How will the other kids feel?” If they can envision the experience and understand the consequences of not arriving on time, you may actually stand a chance of getting out the door--and,

possibly even with their shoes! I have actually had one of my children (who shall remain unnamed) arrive at our not-so-close-to-home destination and ask, “Where are my shoes?” to which I replied, “ON YOUR FEET, *right?*” They weren’t and we wound up searching for the nearest Target store!



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Assure your children that whatever they were longing to do instead of getting in the car will be there for them when they return. Visualizing what will happen, or not happen, as a result of their action, or inaction, is often a successful way to get results. Nobody wants to disappoint the team or coach by being late! Also effective, although militaristic sounding, are one word commands: “Shoes-Car-Please” convey all the instructions they need. Not much decoding is required!

One parent wrote me with a great idea for helping her son to get ready on time, every morning. They sat down together and agreed on the chores that needed to be completed, and in what order. Then, they color-coded those chores: Blue (1) Eat

breakfast, Red (2) Get dressed, Yellow (3) Brush teeth, and so on. Each morning, she would hand her son his set of cards, each with Velcro tabs, which he would take with him to each task and stick them to the dresser, mirror, etc., wherever the chore had taken place. He quickly learned the morning routine and was able to complete the chores, without distraction, in time for them to leave for school each day. You could play with this idea and create two sets of cards, each numbered, then place the #1 card next to what you want your child to do (perhaps, on the hairbrush, next to the bar of soap, or under the toothbrush). They search for their numbered cards, in a row, completing the obvious task as they go, then “turn in” their two sets of cards indicating they are ready to go! Perhaps a timer could be implemented and the whole thing could be a game?

### **Make it fun so the job gets done!**

The right hemisphere enjoys absurdity and thrives on humor. So, use it everywhere! A silly, singsong voice or foreign accent engages visual-spatial children and gets them participating. In our home, we try to present chores that need doing, or some other task they dread, in a British or Australian accent. Pretty soon, the kids are mocking the accent as they complete the task. Everyone is silly about it, but the job gets done. Background music and lots of dancing work great, too! Vacuuming isn't such toil with The Beatles blaring in the background. Make daily routines a big production! What's big and fun and noisy can make chores and other dreaded rituals much less drudgery. Even Mary Poppins understood the importance of song and silliness to “help the medicine go down” or tidy the nursery!

Recently, my dear friend and her husband were stranded in a snowstorm and had to seek refuge in our home. We had about 45 minutes notice to clean house, make a fresh bed and scrub the bathrooms! We gobbled down the rest of our dinner and set to work. With the radio blaring, we each set to a different chore. By the time our guests had arrived, not only was the house clean, but the boys had also constructed a “check-in” desk out of a cardboard box, complete with paper computer and mouse, door keys to slide into paper “locks” on their door, a welcome basket of fruit waiting in their room and room service options available for them! We had such fun anticipating their arrival that the chore of cleaning and preparing the house in a big hurry was just another necessary step in all the fun.

There are lots of creative ways to get your kids to complete homework, chores or other things that are creating disharmonious homes. Find what works for you and your family and let the fun begin!

\*Excerpted from *Raising Topsy-Turvy Kids: Successfully Parenting Your Visual-Spatial Child* (2004) Denver: DeLeon Publishing.

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