

Keepsake Notebook

If you are a parent then chances are you have at least one box full of random coloring pages, hand prints and school papers...that is, if you're fairly organized. If you aren't so orderly then you may have several boxes of your children's keepsakes - or they may be scattered throughout your drawers and filed all over your house. Whether your child leaves a trail (or perhaps "mountain") of arts and crafts wherever she goes or he thinks coloring is as much fun as a dentist check up, there will be plenty of childhood keepsakes to store and keep forever.

A **Keepsake Notebook** is a great way to preserve prized artistic creations in an organized way so that they can be easily viewed and enjoyed for years to come. Here's how to make your own:

1. You'll need: a large 3-ring binder (3" or larger), dividers (purchase or make your own from old file folders), sheet protectors. *HINT: You can purchase a pretty notebook if you want or just buy a white one with the clear pockets on the outside then cut and insert your favorite wrapping paper to create the look you want.*
2. Use the dividers to divide your notebook by year. If you have an exceptionally creative child you may need several notebooks (one for preschool, one for elementary, one for middle & high school).
3. Sort through your precious collection of keepsakes. This may sound harsh but you do not need to keep everything. Let me repeat, you do not need to keep everything. Your child will not care (nor do they need to know) if you toss a few random doodles here and there. Keep pieces that are particularly special either to you or your child and pieces that show memorable milestones - like hand prints or report cards or hand drawn mother's day cards or the first time your child drew naked people (always a fun memory).
4. Sort the keepsakes you will save by year and slide them into sheet protectors. Put them behind the appropriate divider in your notebook.
5. Look through the notebook periodically with your child and share your memories with them. They won't remember making that hand print turkey for Thanksgiving when they were three but they'll enjoy hearing you fondly remember the time you spent together all those years ago.

FAQ: What do I do with items that aren't flat (pet rocks, bird houses, horrid collections of dead flowers and/or bugs)?

I'd bet most of those items are stored away in a box because they are ugly and you're just keeping them because precious Junior made them with his own two hands. If so, take a picture, print it out and write a description of when/where/how it was made. Keep the picture but toss the item itself. Not only does this clear out some of your clutter but you'll be teaching your children that it's ok to let go of material possessions...even ones that are hand made. Many children are natural "collectors" - and true collections can be great fun but if your child is just collecting random, useless trash then a lesson in letting go is probably way over due.

If, however, the items in question are beautiful or useful consider adding one or two to your regular decor - display on a bookshelf for instance. Or, gift the items to grandparents or perhaps to nursing home or hospital patients that could use a little gift to brighten their day. (Feel free to take pictures first to keep in your Keepsake Notebook.)

Either by tossing or donating these items you're getting rid of clutter in your home and teaching your child that the real joy is in the creating of the item and not in the unnecessary keeping of it. Rather than have these items collecting dust in the bottom of a closet perhaps your child can learn to share some of their joy with others by making things and then giving them away.

A Compromise: Following the one-in-one-out principle, allow your child to keep the items in his/her own room. "One-in-one-out" says that for every new item you bring into a space one item must be tossed/donated. If there is a keepsake Junior just can't part with, that's fine (assuming it isn't a health hazard). Allow him to keep it in his own room...but, he has to choose something else from his room to part with. It's a win-win - mom gets rid of clutter, Junior learns to make choices about what's most important.

Once all your keepsakes are organized in a notebook or displayed in a prominent place...ENJOY! Have fun flipping through those pages and remembering all those precious moments with your babies.