

Organization mom

Actress and mother Leah Remini explains how she keeps her back-to-school house in order

BY RAVEN SNOOK

We first met Leah Remini during our spring Clean Out for Kids garage sale. She and her colleagues on *The Talk* donated items to our sale, which helped raise more than \$35,000 for Share Our Strength and its campaign to end childhood hunger. What we discovered on *The Talk* was not just generosity but a kindred spirit: Leah is an organizer. And with a household that includes husband Angelo Pagán, daughter Sofia, stepsons Nico, Alex, and Angelo, and a husky named Blue, she has a lot to manage. As the kids get ready to go back to school—and Leah heads back to work—the multitasker shares her favorite organizing tips that make her hectic life a little easier.

1 WORK AHEAD I make lunches and lay out Sofia's clothes the night before. Then, in the morning, I just put ice packs in the lunches and go. Really—who wants to fight with a 7-year-old in the morning? **BHG TIP:** Knock out the whole week and put outfits together Sunday evening.

2 GO ON A BIRTHDAY BLITZ At the beginning of the school year, I get the birthdays of all Sofia's classmates from her teacher. I keep that list in my bag and I try to purchase gifts for all of the birthdays at one time. Same thing with birthday cards. I make one trip and stock up on a variety. **BHG TIP:** A pretty storage box will keep the cards handy and organized.

3 GET UP EARLIER THAN EVERYONE ELSE That's the only way I can do some kind of workout, have coffee, answer e-mails, and get myself together. Even though I'm always tired when the alarm goes off, I'm also happy to get that time alone. It's the most peaceful time in the house. **BHG TIP:** Try to take a few minutes for yourself every day: An afternoon tea, mid-day walk, or 5-minute meditation can help keep the chaos in perspective.

SANITY SAVERS

Don't start school without these essential supplies

Checklists When the kids walk out the door, do they worry that they've forgotten something? Sure, you could give them ginkgo, but you're probably better off with a comprehensive checklist. Kathy Jenkins of organizing consultants Come to Order recommends Get Your Gear Cards (available at simplyordered.com). "I'm big on kids being responsible for their own stuff," she says. "These tags have an inventory of everything they need and easily clip into their backpacks."

A Portable Workstation Many families spend a ton of money on tricked-out desks. Don't. "Lots of kids end up doing their homework on their beds, on the sofa, even on the floor," advises Donna Goldberg of OrganizedStudent.com. She suggests setting up a mobile workstation so they can easily move from room to room or desk to floor. Lap desks are handy for writing and typing (Lapgear's are reasonable and widely available), and most other supplies can fit into a classic tool box and a file carrier (available at containerstore.com).

"I clean and organize to clear out my own mind—it's a sort of therapy." Leah Remini



Analog Clocks Although it might seem quaint in this digital age, analog clocks help children manage time effectively. "They see how time is chunked," Goldberg says. She adds that parents need to be careful not to skew time. "On the playground, you give a 5-minute warning. Twenty minutes later you leave. The next morning you say the bus is coming in 5 minutes—that's a totally different 5 minutes." Put analog clocks everywhere—in the kids' rooms, by the front door, even on your dashboard. It's totally worth your time. ■