

The Offload List

The first ten things I stopped holding, in the order I let them go. Your brain is the most expensive processor in the house. Stop using it as a filing cabinet.

When a system fails, we do not tell it to try harder. We redesign it.

Motherhood is the only system where we skip that step and blame the person holding it up. So this is the redesign, or the first pass of it: ten things I moved out of my head and into a file that knows my house. Permanently. They are in the order I let them go, and the order matters. The boring ones went first on purpose.

How a thing earns its place

Three questions. A yes to all three and it goes.

1 • Does it repeat?

Weekly, per form, every August.

2 • Does it already have a known answer?

The same twelve facts, the same message, the same list.

3 • Does it need my judgment, or just my memory?

Memory can be stored. Judgment stays with me.

If it repeats, has a known answer, and only needs memory, I was never the right place to keep it.

The first ten

1 The standing facts about my house.

Ages, sizes, allergies, the pediatrician's number, the teacher's name, who is allowed at pickup, the food rules, the kid who will not eat sauce. I was retrieving these from memory forty times a week, usually while doing something else. Now they live in one plain-text file. Everything else on this list runs off that file. This one went first because nothing else works without it.

2 The shape of the week.

Sunday night I used to lie there running the whole week like a movie, looking for the collision. Now the week gets laid out flat once, the collisions get flagged before they happen, and the three things that matter get named so the other nineteen stop pretending to be urgent. Ten minutes. Then I sleep.

3 The school email pile.

The school sends the fall festival volunteer form and "we close early tomorrow" in the same font with the same urgency. I was reading all of it to find the one line that needed me. Now the pile gets read for me and I only touch what needs a human.

4 The form answers.

Every form asks the same questions. Emergency contact, insurance, allergies, the second phone number. I retyped them standing up at 9pm for years. Now the file drafts what it already knows and hands me a short list of what it does not.

5 The supply list.

Two kids, two teachers, two different ideas about glue sticks. The lists became one trip only after I cross-referenced them in my head in the parking lot. Now they get merged, checked against what is already in the house, and handed back as one run.

6 Registration morning.

The signup that opens at 8:00 and fills by 8:04. I cannot control the server. I can control whether every answer is sitting ready before it opens. That prep used to live in my head for a week beforehand. It lives in a file now.

7 The sick-day messages.

A feverish kid on your shoulder at 7am is a terrible time to compose eleven messages from scratch. The file already knows who needs to hear from me, in what order. It writes the cascade. I make the calls that need a person.

8 The reorder list.

Contacts, the dog's medication, the water filter, the vitamins, the size-up on shoes. Things that run out on a schedule and that I was noticing only when they were already gone. They are on a dated list now, and the list tells me before the drawer is empty.

9 The “remember to tell him” list.

The half-sentences I was carrying until my husband walked in the door, then forgetting until he walked out again. They go in the file the moment I think of them. The handoff happens on paper, and I stop being the messenger.

10 Where things are.

The shot records. The wifi password. The warranty on the dishwasher. The folder with the birth certificates. I was the house's search engine. Now the answer to “where is the” lives one question away, and the question does not have to be to me.

What stayed

Some things did not qualify, and I kept them on purpose. Bedtime. The hard conversation. Which doctor. Whether the kid is really sick or really tired. Anything where the answer is a judgment and the judgment is mine. The whole point of moving the first ten was to have room for these. *If a thing needs you to decide, it stays. If it only needs you to remember, it goes.*

The order matters

Nothing glamorous went first. The standing facts went first, because every other item runs against them. The boring, repeating, known-answer jobs went next, because they were eating bandwidth every single week with nothing to show for it. *Start there.* One file with the facts. Then hand off the first repeating job that has a known answer. Skip the hardest one. Take the most boring one.

The privacy line

First names only in the file, no school names, no employer, no addresses, no account numbers. “My ten year old” and “the Tuesday activity” do every job a real name would do.

If this closed a tab

Items two through seven are the six routines inside The Household Mainframe, and item one is the file they run on. One 20-minute interview writes the file. The routines come installed. You own the files, no subscription. mainframemom.com/household-mainframe