

CLEAN YOUR ROOM!

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I know this probably doesn't happen in your home, but sometimes in our house our children don't clean their room. In the event that you too have children like ours, this article may be helpful!

One of the most obvious, but helpful pieces of information about children is that their priorities are very different from ours. Like I said, it's obvious. As adults we often set ourselves up for frustration by wanting children to have the same priorities as ours. Unless you have one of those children that just love neatness and order (and yes, they do exist!), a messy room is as part of being a child as mud and ice cream.

In our home, our three boys share a room. So, cleaning up the room can be a set up for fighting, which is always fun for the whole family! "It's not my mess!", "I cleaned up my part!", etc. When we just had one child, we actually did a lot of cleaning for him, which I don't suggest. It's a lot easier to involve children in cleaning up after themselves when they're younger (2-3 years old) than to wait until they can put up a good argument! As children get older (6 + years) working together and making a plan to prevent difficulties is critical. Here are some suggestions for avoiding room cleaning battles:

1. Sit down together with your children and create a routine for cleaning rooms. What needs to be done, and when it should happen. Be sure to plan this time in a way that you can hold them responsible for their end of the agreement (i.e. Fridays before television time, Saturday mornings before playtime, etc.). If children do not choose to clean their room, then simply follow through by saying something like , "You can watch a movie when your room is cleaned."
2. Involve children in decorating and organizing their room. Organizing is a learned skill. Teach them some of the tricks you use for organization.
3. Work side by side with children up to age 6. Big messes can be overwhelming for young children.
4. If you start with very young children (ages 2-5) it is easier to set up expectations for putting things away up front before they get into bad habits. "This is how you put your toys away when you are finished. We always put one toy away before we take out another."
5. Use shelves vs. toy boxes for toys. It is easier to manage and organize toys on a shelf than in a box, and it is easier to put them away!
6. Some families are OK with allowing children to keep their rooms however they want. This is an option.
7. With younger children, avoid doing it all for them. Instead, give prompts and help isolate the difficulty: "Where does this car go?" "Let's find all your dolls and put them in the doll area." "Can you show me how to put your blocks away?" Do this until the room is clean.
8. Use a plastic storage box for "special stuff" that can be slid under your child's bed (artwork, stuff from school, etc.), and when it is full they can pick and choose what stays in the box. The rest can be thrown out. For really special stuff use a file in your filing cabinet.
9. Does your child have too many toys? If so, it may be an overwhelming task to put them all away. By using a shelf system, you can limit the toys that are in the room to those that fit neatly on the shelves. The rest can go to storage or get donated.
10. Let your child know that it is not OK to have a messy room, and if they don't clean it you will. However, if you clean it, let them know that you get to make the decisions regarding what gets thrown out, what goes into storage, and what stays.
11. Set the room cleaning routine at a time when you clean your room too, so that everyone is working together. This works well for older children to let them know that they're not alone and that you're all in it together.