

Family Living Connection

Brittany Weisenbeck, Family Living Intern

Messy Rooms? Not a Messy Chore

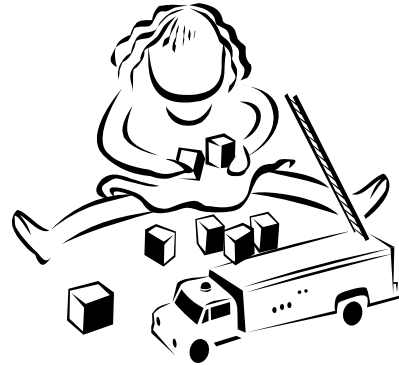
Now that school is out for the summer, are you finding that your child's room seems messier? Do you have trouble getting ready in the morning because your child can not find something they need for the day? Does your child translate "picking up your room" into "pave a path from the bed to the door?" It sounds like you are facing a common family battle—getting your child to pick up his or her room. Here are some tips for young and school-aged children to help them learn to pick up their rooms and relieve family stress. If you want to learn more tips, read on!

Young Children Ages 3-4

- Make a fun game out of sorting items into bins.
- Use a timer to see how fast they can pick up their clothes or toys.
- Label bins with pictures of items that belong in the bin. For example, use a picture of cars on the car bin so that your child can see what goes where.
- Clean with your child. Sit in the middle of the room and ask your child, "I wonder where this goes? Can you show me?" Or, use sing-song to guide your child with putting items away. For example, sing "Books on the shelf, toys in the chest, and soon the room is clean!"

School-Aged Children

- Limit the toys that your child uses. When they are done playing, tell them that they must put away the first toy before getting another out.



- Have shelves at your child's height to store their toys on.
- Go through your child's toys and regularly donate unwanted and un-used items to a charity.
- Teach them to fold laundry and put it away.
- For the older child, set aside one day a week for your child to clean his or her room. Enforce that time frame for best results.

Scream Free Cleaning

Teaching children to pickup after themselves helps ease stress in families while children learn lifelong skills. Positive discipline is an excellent method. It helps get rid of unwanted behaviors and increases desirable behaviors by rewarding the positive behaviors rather than punishing the negative behaviors. Here are some methods using positive discipline that you might try out.

Clear communication is helpful with younger children. Say, "When you have picked up all your toys, you may watch TV." Just make sure you use "when" and not "if" with this method.

Family Living Connection

Brittany Weisenbeck, Family Living Intern

A method that you can use with elementary and older children is the Chip System, which provides immediate rewards for good behavior and immediate consequences for poor choices. Gather up some poker chips, marbles, or similar objects. Find a jar, fishbowl, or some other container that you can see through to collect the reward chips. Hold a positive family meeting where the whole family will decide what behaviors will earn chips and what behaviors will result in losing chips. Behaviors that result in earning chips might include: making the bed, putting clothes or toys away, doing things the first time asked, etc. It is important that when you see your child doing positive things, you immediately drop a chip into the jar. Behaviors that cause chips to be withdrawn might include: refusing to put clothes or toys away, arguing, etc. Have your family decide what privileges the child will earn with his or her chips. Examples include: computer time (4 chips= 30 min.), renting a movie (5 chips), going to a friends' house (10 chips), etc.

Another method that might work for families with school-age children is a chart system. Hold a family meeting to discuss the implementation of the chart system. Make sure that the chores you include on the chart are age-appropriate for your kids. There are many chart system ideas available, so find the one that best fits with your family. Ideas can be found at:
<http://housekeeping.about.com/od/involvingfamily/a/5easycharts.htm>. Also, consider what rewards you and your family would find motivating.

Remember, all families are different and it is up to you and your family to choose what method works best for your lifestyle. Consistent rules and enforcement are important in keeping your child motivated to clean his or her room. Another pointer to keep in mind is to be realistic when setting goals with your family. You may have the vision of a perfectly spotless room, while your child may be thinking that clean is having all of his or her toys put away. Have a discussion and talk about goals that would be agreeable to you both. Finally, concentrate on your family's weakest area when it comes to housecleaning. Start small and build on these successes. For example, set the goal that your school-age child will put away his or her toys. Move to other chores when they have mastered that task. Remember, your family is unique and you may have to experiment with different methods and be very consistent and patient along the way.

Questions? Contact Julie Keown-Bomar, Family Living Educator at Eau Claire UW-Extension Office at (715) 830-4712.

References:

- About.com: Housekeeping, accessed June 20, 2007:
<http://housekeeping.about.com/od/chorechart1/a/ageapprchores.htm>
- Child Development Institute Website, accessed June 20, 2007: 1)
<http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/parenting/parenting.shtml>
- Life Organizers Website, accessed June 20, 2007:
<http://www.lifeorganizers.com/cleaning/tips-to-keep-your-child-room-neat.htm>
- Nelson, J., Lott, L., & Glenn, S. (1993). *Positive discipline a-z: 1001 solutions to everyday parenting problems*. Rocklin: Prima Publishing.