

# Kids and Clutter

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Sick of the clean-up battles? Tired of hearing “Mom, where’s my....” Do the kids ignore your threats of “You will clean up this room or...”? Do you ask your kids to put away their things 20 times and they still won’t do it? Do you resent giving in and always doing it yourself?

The ability to organize is not innate; it’s a learned skill just like reading or math. Teaching your child organizational skills is a difficult but worthwhile project that benefits both you and your child.

Developing these skills will...facilitate his/her chance of academic skills; enhance independence and self-esteem; improve the ability to work cooperatively as a team member and increase productivity, efficiency and responsibility.

Here are 10 guidelines that will help parents with this difficult task:

1. **SET A GOOD EXAMPLE.** As the parent you are your child’s primary role model. and if you aren’t organized, your kids are being sent the wrong message. If you have cluttered and disorganized house, **DO NOT** expect your child to actively de-clutter and organized his/her space. Remember “Actions speak louder than words”.
2. **DON’T DO IT FOR THEM.** If you want them to grow up into responsible, self-sufficient adults, don’t clean up their messes. If you do, you’re not only putting more stress on yourself, but also depriving them of a chance to learn and grow.
3. **KEEP IT SIMPLE.** Have you ever noticed your child’s coat sitting in front of the closet instead of inside? That’s because most children are “one-steppers”. They complete tasks that take one step and avoid complicated systems. Use hooks and cubbies with specific purposes for ease of use.
4. **ESTABLISH HOMES AND ZONES.** Everyone knows where to find a spoon in their house. Develop “homes” for your children’s things with that level of commitment, and put those home in the “zones” where they will be used.
5. **ROUTINES AND HABITS.** Routines standardize processes and make tasks easier to remember and complete. In addition, they will form into habits. Using labels helps establish habits by reminding the children to make the extra effort to put things away.
6. **GIVE THEM OWNERSHIP.** Never attempt to de-clutter or organize their “stuff” without their permission, input and active participation. It’s their room, their “stuff” and their mess. They need to be involved in the process, especially in the decision making – what to keep and where to keep it.
7. **MAKE THEIR CHORES AGE APPROPRIATE.** Assign realistic, age appropriate chores to minimize the child’s frustration and increase his/her sense of accomplishment and mastery. You wouldn’t expect a 7 year old to do calculus. For example, a 3 or 4 year old can be given the task of putting their dirty clothes in the hamper, but folding or putting away their clothes would be more appropriate for a 6 to 10 year old. Design systems appropriate for your child’s size and point of view.
8. **REWARDS AND REMINDERS.** Implement a reward system. If they do what you want, with the time frame you set, implement a reward with praise or privileges. Eliminate napping or power struggles. Begin teaching them to eliminate excess and unwanted items at an early age. Schedule some annual “De-Junking Days” and have them participate in the process. Some good times would be right before Christmas or their birthday, or during the change of seasons.
9. **TEACH THEM THE CONCEPT OF ENOUGH.** If they never know what “enough” is, how do they ever feel the satisfaction of reaching their goal? Children are bombarded with sophisticated media urging them to consume and collect. Help them become aware of need versus wants and how “more” often becomes a burden.
10. **TEACH THEM THE VALUE OF GIVING.** Teach your children to select things to give to less fortunate people and to make room for new things to come into their lives. Always place a container for donations in a highly accessible area and praise the children when they contribute to others.

Teaching and modeling the skills children need to have order in their lives is a lifelong gift. Children can grasp these concepts and develop good habits at an early age; however it is never too late to set your children up for success with simple systems, techniques and strategies.



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