

Four Tips for Teaching Kids to Put Away Their Toys

Kids today have too many toys. All parents, no matter their parenting philosophy, can agree on that. The effect of those toys on the home environment can be utter chaos. An immaculate living room can be ruined within five minutes of children being turned loose to play.

“Toddlers have an incredible capacity to make a mess; like human tornadoes, they’ll strew the entire contents of their toy shelves onto the floor in a blink of the eye (or so it seems),” [writes](#) Heidi Murkoff, author of *What to Expect When You’re Expecting*.

There are several ways to address this problem. Ideally, children would own fewer toys. Parents should purge their kids’ toy collections regularly, donating anything that doesn’t get played with. Moreover, children should receive fewer but more meaningful toys as gifts.

It is also critical for children to learn to put their toys away. This teaches valuable lessons, such as caring for their possessions and respecting the rest of the family by not leaving a mess.

Establishing a daily routine of toy cleaning will take some work. In the long run, however, it will make parents’ lives easier.

I have three small children, and we have developed the habit of putting away toys once a day before bed. This is also the approach advocated by Murkoff. She writes, “Both you and your child will go crazy if you try to keep a cap on the mess all day. With younger toddlers, it’s better to wait until the end of the day to clean up everything at once.”

Here are four tips to help parents teach their kids to put away their toys:

1. Tidy With them

With small children, it is essential that parents join in the tidying. It simply does not work to tell kids to put their toys away and not help them out. They need their parents to show them what to do and to keep them motivated.

2. Set a Timer

I had a bad habit of getting very enthusiastic once we were tidying and going on to try to clean the whole living room. My kids can't handle that and it's not fair to them.

Decide how many minutes you think your kids can handle tidying and then set a timer. Stop when you are done. You can always add more minutes once they have gotten used to the routine.

3. Offer a Reward

As Mary Poppins famously [sang](#), "A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down." I always tell my children they will get a small treat if they put their toys away. Some may say that makes them entitled, but I don't see it that way. Rather, it teaches them that they get paid for doing work.

Those who try this tactic can't be pushovers. I'm quite firm about refusing a child's treat if he or she didn't put away enough toys during the allotted time.

4. Make Tidying Simple

Help your kids by providing easily accessible places for them to put their toys. We have several large wicker baskets that can be picked up and moved around the house. Each basket holds

a different type of toy. This system also makes it easier for kids to locate their toys again the next day.

These are four things I've learned while establishing our family's daily tidying routine. Having said that, I'll be the first to admit that teaching kids to put away their toys takes effort! But in the long run, everyone in the family will benefit.

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