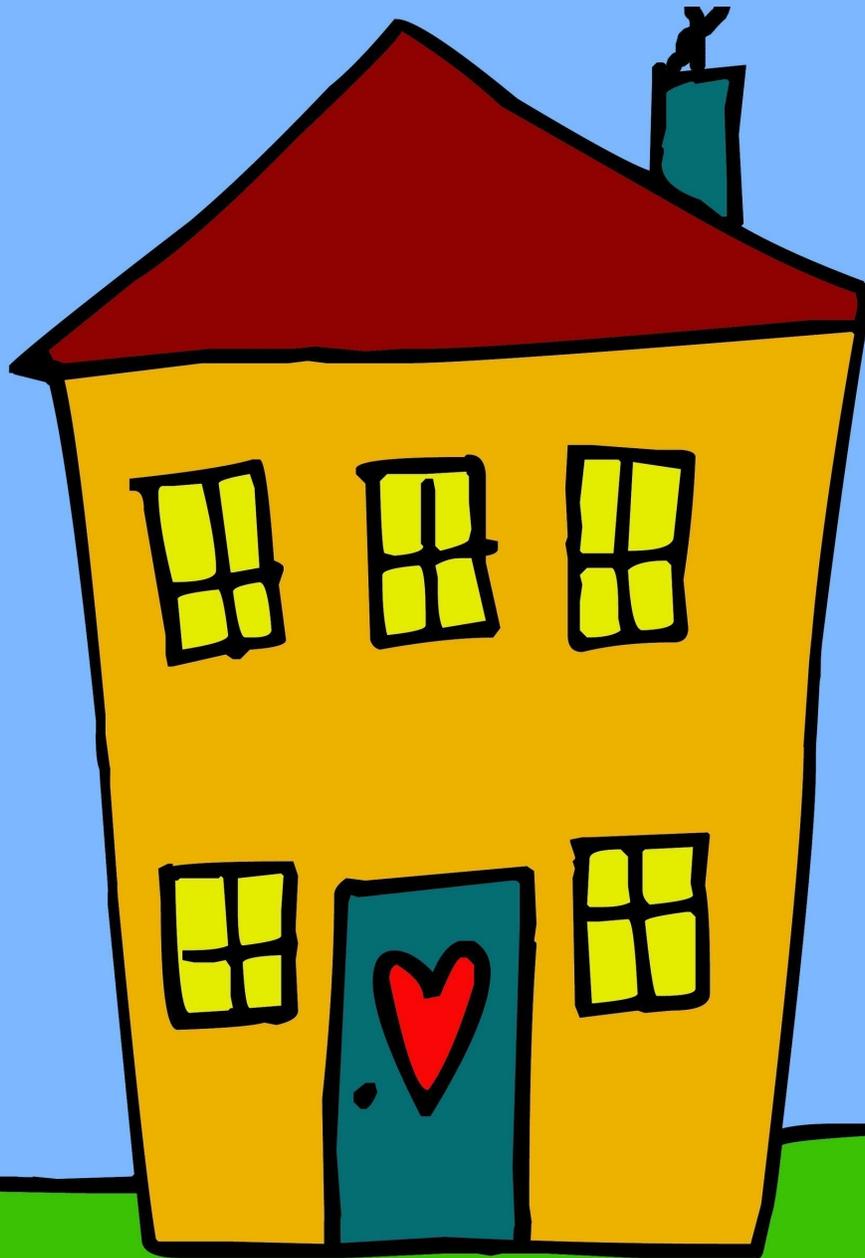


PRETTY

The Clean House



7 Quick Fixes and 4 Tidy Tricks
to Teach Your Kids

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The “Pretty Clean House”

7 Quick Fixes and 4 Tidy Tricks

to Teach Your Kids

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Are you tired of being angry at your kids? Has clean up time in your household turned into a battleground? **Are you tired of living with mess you didn't create? Are you tired of nagging that yields no results?**

I'm a normal mom who used to struggle to maintain a clean and organized home with my three precious little tornadoes. Teaching my kids a few handy cleaning games has really made a difference in our home.

First, though, let's clarify what we're talking about here, because there's a difference...**are we "cleaning" or are we "tidying?"**

If my kids would just automatically pick up their stuff and keep the common areas **tidy**, I would be the world's happiest woman. In a pinch, I'll take a tidy house over a clean one any day. There are times when you need to [clean](#) and times when you just need the house picked up a little (or a lot)...



Actually, a decluttered and tidy, but not-super-clean, home is much more attractive than a clean but messy or cluttered home. **An organized home is easy to clean and easy to keep that way.** Sometimes, we say "clean" when we really mean "tidy." Kids need to understand the difference between the two (and so do you) because each has different expectations. Make sure you outline these differences on their [cleaning lists](#). Establishing a routine where kids are expected to pick up after themselves (every night, for example) gives you a clean slate every morning. I have my own routines and rubrics for cleaning, but right now we're going to focus on a basic clean up.

Do your kids know the difference between "clean" and "tidy?"

Necessity is indeed the mother of invention, so **here are seven cleaning games and four other tidying tricks** that I've created to make clean up time fun and easy.

The Seven Quick Fixes

1. I Spy

Intro: This collaborative cleaning game is easy, fun and actually quite effective in a short amount of time. I Spy is a great go-to strategy especially if the mess in a room was a collaborative effort.

How to Play: Take turns identifying two or three problems in a messy room: "I spy with my little eye...a red shirt on the floor, some blocks and my backpack."

Then after everyone identifies some mess, say "ready, set, GO!" and race to put away the items each person has identified. Race back to your seats. Repeat



Usually a room that looks like a tornado hit it starts to look normal again in about three or four rounds. Gently competitive cleaning games like this one may be a great combo for your family.

Why it works: Kids who are in charge of a certain space become accountable for that space. I used to get so irritated when one of my kids would say "mommmy! I'm donnnne!" clearly not having done anything. When I went to go look and I would be thinking, "Exactly what did you do?? I seriously can't tell."

Make tidying fun and collaborative and they'll have it done in no time.

Accountability is a big part of teaching kids how to clean up after themselves and to clean in general: **kids really don't see the mess that we see!** Cleaning games like "I Spy" encourage kids to look for the mess in a room on their own without a parent standing there saying the equivalent of "you missed a spot."

When to use it: Any time you have a mess that is not just one person's fault. Any time you need to clean up quickly.

2. "Go Get a Second Opinion..."

Intro: You tell one of your kids to clean up a room. He comes back in a few minutes (or a few hours) insisting he's done, but when you check the task is not really complete. Sound familiar?

How to do it: After a child cleans up his/her room or does a cleaning job around the house, they **ask someone else in the family to assess their work before they come to a parent.** Just say, "go get a second opinion..."

Why it works: This has several benefits.



- kids tend to do a better job if they know that they are soliciting the opinion of an older (or worse--younger) sibling.
- the junior inspector gets some practice honing their all too important observation skills.
- kids do not waste my time saying

“mommmm, I'm donnnnne” when they're really not.

*Help your kids
to see the mess
so they can be
cleaning
experts!*

When to use it: As opposed to the I Spy game above, use this to encourage one person in particular to evaluate his own work.

3. Use Your “Tidy Eyeballs”

Intro: Sometimes a goofy family phrase can really catch on and make a chore silly and fun. This is a modification of the “go get a second opinion” strategy and can be used when no sibling is available. After one child says he’s done with a cleaning task, encourage him to really look critically at the work he has done before you check it yourself.

The goal is to have kids actually see the mess and pick it up without nagging. When a child is told to “clean a room,” he needs to:

- analyze the room,
- understand what it should look like clean,
- evaluate how it looks now, and
- identify what steps need to happen to get it clean.



These are huge life skills and involve a great deal of higher level thinking! Kids need support and practice to learn how to do this effectively. Without naming names, even my darling husband needed some work in this department many years ago.

How to Play: Say, “Go back and use your tidy eyeballs.” Explain that **they need to look at the room as if they were Mom and see what more needs to be done.** You can have fun with it, especially with younger kids, and make a dramatic display of pretending to take your eyeballs out and hand them over, and they can give their eyeballs to you (really not as gross as it sounds).

Why it works: Some kids really get into the role of pretending to be Mom, and I've even heard more than once someone saying to himself in my voice “That's a great start, but it looks like you missed.....”

This game also **helps kids see the mess they create so that they can tidy up without your involvement,** which is, of course, the ultimate goal.

When to use it: When one child is working alone on a cleaning or tidying task, and no one else is available for a second opinion.

4. “Team Brothers” (or Sisters or Siblings)

Intro: Team brothers (or sisters or siblings) is a collaborative approach to any clean up job, where **no one is done until everyone is done.**

How to Play: In the rooms where the mess is a community problem, say, “Okay, we’re going to do Team Brothers on this one, guys!” They work together at the same time to undo their mess.

Why it works: Truthfully, this strategy doesn't work in all families, because it can lead to resentment if not everyone is trying. It can, though, encourage a team approach, with the older(s) helping the younger(s). You know the dynamic between your kids and know if this would work or how you could modify it (or consider number 5 below, Chore Buddy).



When to use it: If it seems to you that not everyone is doing their fair share on a collaborative job, encourage kids to work together instead of just bailing out.

5. Hire a “Chore Buddy”

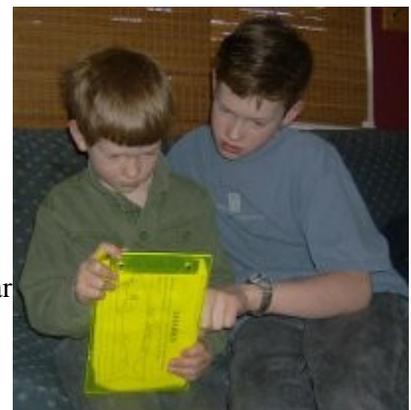
Intro: Young kids sometimes (okay, often) benefit from a constant supervisor, but there’s not always time, is there? If I expected my older kids to shadow their little brother and make sure he does his chores, they would understandably start to resent it. The answer is to make it a job for hire, a win-win for all.

Don't expect a child to do work for or with a sibling unless you're willing to compensate.

How to Do It: Negotiate **paying an older sibling to help a younger sibling do all his chores.** I usually get away with paying a dollar a week for this huge help.

Why it Works: If kids are expected to do work that is not theirs, they should be compensated for it. They appreciate the fairness of that, and in turn, they typically do a great job.

When to Use it: Any time someone needs some help that you may not be able to give at the moment. If your least responsible little one has trouble with morning chores/evening chores, homework, etc. consider having other members of the family chip in.



6. Beat the Clock

Intro: The concept of racing the clock is motivating even to my older kids.

How to Play: When kids have a task, either cleaning job or picking up toys or tidying up their room, just put some time on a timer (microwave, iphone, watch, whatever) and **let them race around trying to finish within the allotted time.**



Why it works: Most people are motivated to win in this way, and not just kids by the way! A timer is a great housekeeping tool for this. Some of these cleaning games can work with grown ups too. You yourself probably have certain household chores that you despise (for me it's sweeping and mopping the floor—UGH!) Take a guess at how long it would take to complete that job, and write it down. Seriously!

Now put that time on the microwave timer and GO!

Even you might be surprised how much you can accomplish when you have a time limit.

When I try this, **the dreaded chore is almost always significantly less time to complete than I had imagined.** Kids are no different and are further motivated to beat the clock. You can even ask them how many minutes they want on the clock--they'll be pretty accurate.

When to use it: I use this twice a day, for “morning chores” and “evening chores” when I expect all kids to be working at the same time on various chores. They work through their [checklists](#) in fifteen minutes, (which I count down on our stove timer). You could also offer an incentive, like **if they complete all their work before the beep, they get extra time to read in bed before lights out.**

7. How Many Seconds?

Intro: A modification of the Beat the Clock game designed for younger kids who are motivated by a time challenge. This still works on my six year old, but probably not for much longer...

How to Play: Before a task, just ask, “how many seconds do you need?” Then let him answer (my guy usually overestimates deliberately, but that’s fine) and then I start counting while he races off.

Why it works:

Again, kids are often motivated by a time limit. When I ask my youngest “how many seconds?” it doesn't really matter what he estimates, because I'm not really counting! He snaps into action, and that's the important thing.

When to Use It: Use this one when you're in a hurry and/or if it's a quick job or if you don't have time to even put minutes on the timer.

Offer an incentive for kids to hustle – like extra reading time before lights-out.

The next time you are looking at a messy room, get the kids involved with one of these seven fun games! Tidying up as a family saves time and gets the job done.

The Tidy Tricks

I used to struggle to get my kids to pick up toys from their room or general areas. “But he got them out not me!” “But he made the mess not me!” Does that sound familiar? Instead of the nagging that used to take place, I found a way to motivate.

Having a mostly clean, mostly tidy home most of the time does require a little bit of structure. It boils down to two things:

- things having a place
- kids having a designated time to put things away

For tidying up general or common areas, here are **four strategies to make it easier for kids to contribute.**

1. Get into the Zone -- Cleaning Zones, that is...

Divide up the house into reasonable zones. This can be by floor, by room, or even parts of rooms. **Each child gets a zone to manage (i.e. keep it tidy).** You can either assign a zone to each child, or let them choose. This is a great way for kids to learn to get organized.

In our family, my kids of course keep their bedroom (mostly) clean and tidy, and they also are responsible for keeping a common zone of the house tidy (daily) and clean (weekly).

*Why clean
the whole
house?
Delegate!*

When kids are responsible for a common area (that may or may not be cluttered with their own belongings) there's an ownership that is different than with their own bedroom. Watch your kids begin to actually see the mess accumulate and even address the mess-maker during the day! My youngest (whose zone is the bathroom) hollered at me once while I was in the shower, “Mom, can you please make sure you pick up your clothes when you're done?” I love it! Seeing the mess is a huge step.

2. The Family Fifteen

(the most important 15 minutes of your day)

Keeping the house tidy is not kid stuff; it's a family affair. For the general areas that tend to accumulate a lot of clutter and mess, we have a group approach to tidying up. Every evening, our family does a “Family Fifteen.” Young kids emulate adults, so guess what? Roll up your sleeves and work together.

We put on some energetic music and everyone in the family works for 15 minutes. (You'd be surprised how much can be accomplished when everyone is chipping in!) With a family of four, that's an entire hour of work! Well, not really with little ones,

*You will not
believe what
a difference
15 minutes
can make.*

but you get the idea.

Family Fifteen can be a great addition to any nighttime routine, and it really makes a difference. It's important to note that the "**Family Fifteen**" is **not the time to actually put everything away!** Keep it easy by using a container system, like the "tidy-up basket," which is the next tip.

3. The Penalty Box

(or Tidy-Up Basket)

We have what I call a "tidy-up basket" that **collects random things from a zone that need to be put away.** We have a basket in each of the bedrooms and the living room area.

Your challenge, of course, is to regularly **empty the basket in order for this to be effective.** You do not want the tidy-up basket to be a stand-alone storage area! In our family, we tie this system to [allowance](#).

*Every room
needs a catch-
all place for
quick clean up.*

When it's time to pick up toys, clothes, or other things during our [Family Fifteen](#),



kids can just toss things into the "tidy up basket" in their zone instead of putting them all away. I have found that this time saver lets kids work fast. On their [chore chart](#), our kids are supposed to check the basket and remove their belongings. Truthfully, that doesn't always happen, but it's okay, because here's what happens then:

Once a week, on a predetermined day that everyone knows about, **I empty the tidy up basket with no reminder.** If you really want to get kids to clean without nagging, that last part is super important. Believe me, even my six-year old now remembers when the "tidy-up basket" is emptied and will go through it before hand, removing most of his belongings.

So in theory it should be empty every week then, right? Ha ha ha ha ha! I wish. Actually I don't wish, because here's how it works out:

I empty the basket on Wednesday nights. I give out allowance on Fridays. (Woo Hoo! Payday!) **Anything that is left in the basket on Wednesday gets confiscated** into a big plastic bin ("penalty box") that I keep on top of a bookshelf in my bedroom.

Before I give out allowance, I bring down the confiscated stuff from the "penalty box," and lay it all out on the couch in individual piles. In my family, the youngest one is usually the biggest culprit, but he is learning slowly. Then once they see how much (or how little) they have to put away, **I have them make me an offer to buy back their stuff** (Isn't that great?!) and then I subtract that amount from their allowance. That might sound harsh—but if I am treated like a maid, then I charge for my time.

I also make it clear that for any “repeat offenders,” i.e. **toys that are repeatedly not put away**, I have the right to **put them in the Goodwill box**. I don't feel that bad about that, even when they complain and whine (well, they don't let it happen anymore, but in the beginning I had to be firm for the benefit of all of us!) because **I refuse to care more about a material object than they do**. And, since they know I follow through with that threat, they are more responsible.

Make it easy for them! Don't forget to build a time into your week for kids to check and for you yourself to empty the Tidy-Up Basket. Remember that it should not be an actual storage area! Empty it at least once a week! Consistency is important! Make sure you empty the “tidy up basket” each week on the same night. Now our kids know to pick up toys, clothes, etc. without reminders. We as a family keep the house tidy and have responsibility over our belongings, and you can too!

4. The Three Piles make it easy

When I see a mess in someone's bedroom (or anywhere else), just about **every single thing on the floor can fit into one of three categories**:

- trash,
- laundry, or
- stuff-that-can-be-tossed-into-the-tidy-up-basket



When kids see a messy room, it's intimidating! Where to start? Help them strategically approach a mess with this three piles system. Guide your child to focus on the kind of mess they see and where it belongs. Start with trash. Pick up all the trash and throw it away. Next, look for clothes and put that in the dirty laundry. The rest should be toys that aren't put away, and for the time being they can be tossed into the Tidy-Up Basket. And now you're done! At a later time the Tidy-Up Basket will need to be addressed, but the Three Piles system is a great quick fix.

Conclusion

You are not alone. If you have a normal family with normal kids and normal amounts of stuff and activities, then I'm going to guess that you have mess. That's normal too. Yes, mess is normal!

What you can have, though, is a structure that allows **your home to bounce back from the normal mess and wear and tear that comes with kids and their stuff.**

Understand that the difference between a tidy home and a messy home usually boils down to two things:

- having little enough stuff that everything really does have a place
- creating a regular time to put stuff back in their place after use

Use these systems to provide the structure you need for your home to bounce back from normal mess.

So what can you do today to bring yourself closer to a tidy home?

Try these seven games and four tidy tricks to make tidy up time fun for kids and easy for you to create and maintain an organized home. Good luck and have fun! What will you do with your extra time?

Are you inspired? Are you ready to get your house and family in shape? [Click here for a free preview](#) of the ebook, *The New SuperMom!* Learn how smart moms (like you!) have created a cleaner home and a happier family with less work (really!).

For more tips and strategies for involving kids in household chores, visit us at <http://www.choresandchecklists.com!>