

BANANAS HANDOUT

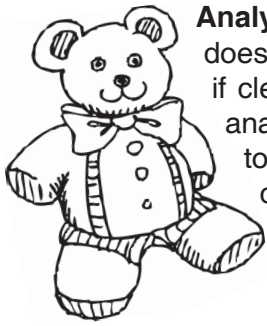
The Uphill Struggle – Getting Young Children To Clean Up Their Rooms

Do you wince every time you pass your child's room? Is it possible something could be growing under the bed – other than dust balls? How can you “inspire” your child to clean-up without setting off a riot?

When we asked BANANAS' newsletter readers for ideas on this subject, we received many good suggestions. We've put those together with a few of our own and came up with the following advice on this timeless topic:

- Start early... even very young children can learn to put away their toys, especially if you make a “game” out of it. Remember to help little ones.
- Try singing a ditty as you put things away, such as “Clean up, clean up everybody clean up” to make the chore more appealing.
- Always give at least a five-minute “warning” that a clean-up time is coming. Setting a timer works well with some children.
- Provide and organize adequate storage space, but don't organize the things themselves. One person's “chaos” often appears very orderly to someone else, especially if that “someone” is child.
- Break down cleaning up a room by tasks: *“First pick up the toys on your bed, then the ones on the floor ... Then put the books back on the shelf ... Now put your dirty clothes in the hamper.”*
- Don't feel guilty about insisting on minimum order – view the situation as one where you and your child reach a compromise; less clean than you would like, cleaner than your child wants.
- Once clean-up begins, have a hard-and-fast rule: *No playing with toys “discovered” along the way.*
- Encourage a routine to cleaning up – making beds right away every morning, putting clothes in the hamper before taking a bath at night, clearing the table after breakfast...
- Set the time for clean-up just before some favorite activity (i.e. a TV show or a trip to the playground) – a little incentive works wonders!
- If the mess isn't too bad, and your child isn't bothered, try closing the door (if possible).
- Set a deadline. Allow your child's room to be messy, but make clear that it needs to be cleaned by a certain time. Some older kids enjoy the freedom they get from being able to “choose” when to do the clean-up.
 - If you want to institute a system of logical consequences, it would go something like this: *“I'm going to vacuum your room tomorrow – anything on the floor will go in a box and be put away for two weeks.”* Or try this one for older kids: *“I'll do the laundry tomorrow. Any clothes that aren't in the hamper won't get washed.”*
- Set a good example – kids pick up inconsistencies (quicker than toys!) and are usually painfully accurate in pointing them out. The best offense is a good defense in this game.
- Don't expect a child's clean-up job to be “perfect” and don't forget to give lots of praise for a job reasonably well done.
- Don't promise rewards for a job well done if you want to get the point across that cleaning up is a necessary part of life rather than a “choice” situation.





Analyze This – If your child usually does well but is having an off-day or if clean-up is always a battle – try to analyze what is really going on. Similar to figuring out anything else about a child’s behavior, you may need to do some detective work and ask some leading questions, such as:
“You looked awfully tired when you came home from school; did you have as bad a day as I did?”

Or try *“Every time I ask you to clean-up, you get so angry. What can we do together to make this situation easier for both of us?”* Refusing to cooperate with household chores may be either a means of getting attention or an expression of unhappiness about other problems unrelated to cleaning up. Solving any underlying problems may make clean-up easier. Note that we said “easier” – it’s never really easy!

Teenager Exemption – This Handout is not meant for parents of teenagers. For many teenagers, living in a messy room is a common way of showing independence from adults and it may be counterproductive for parents to treat teenagers in the same manner as they do younger children.

Take heart – just because your teenager may be a slob today doesn’t mean s/he will grow up to be one. Many self-help books on adolescence advise parents to “pick their battles.” In this context, the best course of action may be to focus on getting teens to keep common areas of the house clean AND to ask teenagers to keep their room doors closed.

