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room | author interview

Getting kids to clean

By Sheba R. Wheeler

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"Go clean your room!"

Commanding that a child to tidy his or her space can create the same anxiety some adults feel when faced with an overwhelmingly messy desk, closet or garage.

Instead, direct the child to complete one specific task at a time for more effective, focused cleaning, advises Marcia Ramsland, author of "Simplify Your Life: Get Organized and Stay that Way!" and an advisory board member of The Housekeeping Channel.



The Denver Post reached Ramsland on the telephone to find out more.

Can you elaborate on your advice for parents whose kids have trouble cleaning their room?

Have them make the bed first. It's one of the largest surfaces in the room, and if it's clean, then the room is 50 to 70 percent clean. Parents can make this process easier by getting them a sheet and a comforter that doesn't show wrinkles. Stay away from thin chenille blankets and the like because all the wrinkles make it hard for the child to feel successful. I also like for parents (to make the bed) with the child. It gives them some time together in the morning.

The floor is another large surface in the room. How do you suggest kids keep their floors clean?

Put everything from the doorway to bed away. It's amazing how large a surface space will appear. That gives the child a sense of order and control.

Why do you recommend cleaning in zones?

Everything has to have a zone for the cleaning process to work well. Clean up the rest of the room by putting things away in categories: clothes, papers, books, toys and collections. Have a clothes hamper in the closet or near it. There should be a desk or countertop in the bedroom where all the papers and books live...

Toys or favorite collections are usually for the younger child. The big toys go on the bottom shelves and put the smaller ones on the next shelf. Top shelf is for Legos and Barbies that are placed on top of trays so they can be lifted down. As the child grows older, they will turn toy shelves into collections of rocks, butterflies and sports (memorabilia). Once they reach high school, the collected items will change again (to) pictures of friends, awards, trophies and favorite books.

You recommend adding one extra cleaning area per week — after the previous three steps above are tackled. What are those areas?

Add the desktop, the dresser top, the nightstand and the closet. You are trying to keep everything in its area. If an area is getting out of control, suggest spending some time on a Saturday morning cleaning it up to get it ready for the week ahead.

For the desktop, get paper and pens ready to go. On the nightstand, you want to put books away from the week, have a good reading light, put out one book for fun reading and one school book that needs to be read before bedtime.

In the closet, hang clothes first. Hold up an item and ask, "Do you like this? Do you wear it?" If the answer is no, put it in a give-away bag. Don't argue with them. They know what their style is and if they are really going to wear it. My favorite organizing principle is this: There is one great day to clean out the closet and that's laundry day. Everything the child likes is in the machine, and everything they don't like is still in the closet and the drawers.

Read more of Ramsland's housekeeping tips and tricks at OrganizingPro.com.

Sheba R. Wheeler: 303-954-1283 or swheeler@denverpost.com

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Cookingguidelive.com carried The Denver Post article, too.