



## Tips for Clean-Up



Does clean-up time feel like a battle zone in your child care? Do you have children who refuse or throw tantrums when it's clean-up time? What can you do to make clean-up time less stressful, but get the job done?

How do you feel about mess? Some providers need everything neat and tidy all the time. Others are willing to let the mess go as long as the children are playing. Clean-up may happen all during the day, where children put away toys when they are finished playing with them, or it may be at a certain time, such as before lunch. Both ways work.

Think about different ways to get children to clean up. If one idea doesn't work, try a different one. See if these ideas work for you and the children in your care.

- Have a place for everything. If every toy has a place where it belongs, picking up

isn't so hard. You may want to put picture labels on different storage places. If a child sees a picture of blocks on the side of a bin, he knows that the blocks go back to that bin at clean-up time.

- Make clean-up time a game. Chores don't seem so bad when children are having fun. Try these ideas:

Set a timer at the beginning of clean-up time. Have the children race the timer to see if they can get all the toys put away before the timer bell rings.

Make clean-up part of playing. "John, please load your truck with blocks, drive them to the block bin, and dump them in." "Geri, see how many dolls you can load in your shopping cart and take them to the doll corner."

- Sing a clean-up song. Sometimes singing a special song helps children stay with the task until it's finished. You can make up your own song to a favorite tune, like the one below:

Sing to the tune of "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush"

*This is the way we pick up our toys,  
Pick up our toys, pick up our toys.*

*This is the way we pick up our toys,  
And put them all away.*

- Fast music can get everybody moving. Turn on a snappy song. The children may want to try to pick up all the toys before the song ends.
- Some caregivers gather the children in a meeting before clean-up time. They look around the room together and talk about

## Make clean-up time fun to get the job done!

what needs to be done for clean-up. The children are asked, "Who will put away the blocks?" "Who will pick up the dolls?" "Who will put away the puzzles?" When each child has a job, they are ready to get to work. As each child finishes his work, he is told to get a book to help him wait while the other children finish their clean-up jobs.

- Tell children if you have a fun activity planned for after clean-up.  
"After we get all the toys picked up, we're going outside to walk to the park."  
Clean-up is a lot more fun when you know there's something exciting when it's done!
- Be a model for the children. The children may need to see you start to pick up toys before they join in. If you stand by and watch, they will want to do the same thing.
- Always remember to praise children for doing a good job of cleaning up.

### Special Projects

There may be times when the children are working on a big project that takes several days to finish, such as a big block tower or an art project. Some providers allow children to save their project to work on at another time. They might help children make a large sign that says, "SAVE," to hold their project until there is time to work on it again. It is important to tell all the children about the special project and to protect it from being bumped by others.

### What about the child who won't clean up?

It's important not to get into power struggles with a child who won't clean up. You don't want to make clean-up time so bad that children hide so they won't have to do it.

At times there may be so many toys to put away that children don't know where to begin. You can help them by breaking the job into smaller parts.

"Karen and John, please put the blocks back on the shelf."

"Sarah, here's the bin where you can put all the little cars."

"Rika, you're in charge of putting the play food back in the cupboard."

Some children might need adult help to get them into the clean-up routine. Start by giving the child a choice. "Eva, you can pick up the trains yourself or I'll help you pick them up." If the child moves in to pick them up, thank her for helping. If the child refuses, tell her, "It looks like you're going to need some help cleaning up these trains." Walk with her to the trains, pick up one and hand it to her, then place your hand over her hand and walk to where the trains are stored. Keep your hand over hers as you place the train on the shelf or in the bin together. Tell her, "Let's go get another train," and repeat the process. Caregivers who try this say it doesn't take long before the child gets the idea and starts to pick up the toys herself.

*Keep a number of clean-up tips in mind. If one doesn't work, try another.*



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