

Make it easier for kids to keep a clean and orderly room

by Mary Sigmann

Have you tried driving to work with a flat tire or empty gas tank? Children are often expected to straighten and clean their room facing similar obstacles. Picture a child trying to make a bed that is wedged between large pieces of furniture, or hang clothes on a rod twelve inches above their head. Make it easier for children to maintain their room by keeping things streamlined, right-sized, and compartmentalized.

STREAMLINE CLOTHING AND TOYS

Simplify clothing by making colors easy to mix and match and keeping only what is currently in use. Store or pass on anything that doesn't fit or is rarely worn. Avoid morning chaos by helping your child pre-plan outfits for the entire week.

Decide how many toys and books your child can comfortably enjoy and keep the rest out of sight. Rotate once a month. If space in the child's room is limited, create a play area in the basement or spare bedroom and keep just a few of their very favorite toys and books in their room.

Bottom line: Do not use your child's room as extra storage space for you. Using your child's closet to hold your out-of-season clothing, or stashing your luggage under their bed, does not foster a sense of "ownership" or encourage responsibility.

MAKE IT RIGHT-SIZED

Inaccessibility is a primary reason things don't get put away. Lower closet rods and shelves so that children can reach them. Hooks hung low are easier than hangers for bulky coats and jackets. Utilize high spaces for out-of-season or rarely used items, or for toys and books on rotation.

Make sure furniture is the right height and size. Select a dresser low enough so that the child can reach the top. Provide a waste basket that is large enough for the amount of trash children typically generate.

Bottom line: Store small items in small containers, large items in big containers. Check out your local discount or home supply store for ideas.

COMPARTMENTALIZE

Use small plastic bins or dishpans for loose items like socks and gloves. Keep school supplies and small toys together by storing them in lidded plastic shoe boxes. Nestle bins and boxes into drawers or on shelves to keep items separated and organized.

Hanging shoe bags work well for various items that need organization. Small items kept in rolling carts with drawers can be wheeled into the closet when not in use.

Bottom line: Label everything. Items kept in drawers, shelves and storage containers that are labeled are more likely to end up in their proper home. Labels can be pictures or words depending on your child's age.

IMPLEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Encourage preferred behavior through clarity, accountability and reward.

Discourage misunderstandings by being specific. Instead of telling children to "clean their room," give them a specific task with clear instructions: "I want all the papers that are cluttering your desk picked up. Either throw them away or put them into a folder for us to go through together." Find out if they really heard you by asking them to repeat your instructions.

To create an incentive for keeping the room clean and clutter-free, make a room inspection chart and assign points to each task. A determined score range will result in a privilege or reward. Inspect the child's room weekly and offer encouragement and helpful suggestions.

Bottom line: Be sure the demands and expectations you place upon your child are reflected in the actions you are modeling. What does your closet or desk top look like?

If you've considered putting an "enter at your own risk" sign on the door of your child's room, first see what you can do to streamline, right-size and compartmentalize. Make the job of keeping an organized room easier for your child and less frustrating for you.

Mary Sigmann is a professional organizer, coach and speaker. For more information see www.organizer-coach.com