

TIP SHEET: **Cleaning Up**

Ages Affected: 2–5 years old

Cleaning up is an important part of your child's development and gives her a sense of responsibility. It also helps to make life a bit less stressful for you!

The importance of teaching your child to clean up:

Of course your child is not going to want to clean up after himself, but unless you want to trip over toys all of the time, it is a chore that you must teach your child. If you are constantly picking up after your child at this age, he will learn to always expect it.

Here are some tips to help teach children to clean up after themselves:

- Start young. If your child is walking, then she is old enough to start learning to put the toys away when playtime is over. Talk your child through it, "Can you put that book on this shelf?" Demonstrate how it's done as well.
- Set a good example. Take care of your own belongings and clean up after yourself.
- When it is almost time to clean up, let him know ahead of time and motivate him by giving him something to look forward to, like an afternoon snack or a trip to the playground.
- Don't just say "clean up." It is easy for your child to be overwhelmed by a big mess, because she doesn't know where to start. Instead, try breaking the job down into little tasks. For example, you could say, "Put away your dolls first and then move to the books."
- Explain why cleaning is necessary. Otherwise your child looks at cleaning up as putting away the fun.
- Make it fun and educational. Create kid-friendly storage. Place removable picture labels on drawers and bins to help kids learn where everything goes. Have your child either draw or cut out of



magazines pictures of specific items (blocks, puzzles, games) that go into each one. Under the picture, write the name of the item. This will also help your child recognize words with objects.

- Make up some songs to sing with your child while you clean up. It makes the job go faster and the peppy music will keep your child in a good mood.
- When her room is finally clean, don't redo what isn't perfect. Lumpy bed sheets? No need to smooth them. Mismatched dollhouse furniture? Ignore it. As long as the job was done properly, just leave it be.
- Reward a job well done. For example, you could keep a chart in the kitchen. As soon as your preschooler finishes his task, give him a sticker to put on the chart.
- Make it a habit. Sometimes you'll be tempted to just put the toys away yourself, especially if bedtime or some other important deadline is approaching. Teach your child to clean up after she is done with the task.
- Over time as your child begins to learn how to clean up, give them direction and allow her to direct herself. Be ready to help if she needs it.