

**TEACHING CHILDREN  
TO CLEAN**



The Ready-Set-Go Solution That Works!



# TEACHING CHILDREN TO CLEAN



Schar Ward



*Teaching Children To Clean:  
The Ready-Set-Go Solution That Works!*

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# DEDICATION

*To my children, Debbie, Robert, and Betty.*

I wasn't always sure I was doing things right when you were growing up, but watching you prepare a meal, set a beautiful table, plan a memorable party and maintain your homes were the inspiration for writing this book. You make me proud to say I'm your mom, and I want other parents to have the same satisfaction of watching their children become responsible, capable and considerate adults who are in charge of their environments and surroundings.

*To the many families I have worked for:*

Thank you for letting me come into your homes for the past many years to gain my experience and knowledge of cleaning.

*To Vicki Lansky, my friend and publisher of my first two books; Coming Clean and It's About Time.* Thank you for having faith in me, and for making it possible for me to see places and do things I never dreamed of as a little girl in Missouri.

*And most of all, to my mom:*

You instilled in me an appreciation for cleanliness, organization, and love of God and family.

*A note of caution*

Care and caution are important when using the information in this book. Conditions and situations are unique to each of us. Products should always be tested in an inconspicuous area first. Always read and follow information on product labels. Common sense counts. Schar Ward disclaims any liability for the use or misuse of any product or idea presented in this book.

# INTRODUCTION

In recent years, I've noticed an explosion in the number of self-help books people are collecting. I wonder, are they reading any of them, or does just owning the books make them feel better?

Everyone appears to be looking for better work habits, more self-esteem, ways to get organized, save time and help with their relationships. The increase of self-help books indicates to me one thing; parents aren't teaching children the life skills they need to cope with everyday situations.

Over time, I have watched parents become more and more busy. They drive for hours on a weekend to get their children to a sports activity that can last all day. They trudge through malls and large grocery stores to shop. They spend hours plugging into and updating their many electronic gadgets. All these things designed to improve their lives, have complicated them even more.

The need and desire for more time is rampant. So, what parent has the time and patience to train their children to clean? In earlier years, most of us lived in rural areas and everyone in the family had to help with the chores, children included. But gone are the days of doing chores like carrying in water, gathering eggs or hanging out laundry. Most kids today don't even know what a clothesline is.

Everything is done for us today. Automation has eliminated hundreds of jobs we once had to share with our children and the skills and principles that went with them. We need to step backward so our children can move forward. We need to go back to teaching kids to clean. It's so important they learn the satisfaction of doing a job and feeling good about it afterward.

Twenty years ago while doing in-home interviews for new cleaning clients, I would come across a closed bedroom door. When I asked if I needed to assess that room for cleaning, the answer was "No, that's my child's room and we don't go in there." The children are now grown, have homes of their own, and have no idea how to clean them because they haven't been taught that life skill.

It's my hope that this book will inspire you to teach children to clean, after all, the home is the best and first classroom.



# START AT THE BEGINNING

## *Research about children cleaning*

Research can be tedious, but did you even know research has been done on the subject of children and cleaning?

It appears that if you want your children to be responsible and self-reliant as they grow into young adults, it can be as simple as teaching them to set the table, pick up toys and help with the laundry! Who knew it was that easy? You just wanted some help around the house and now you find out that teaching your children to clean could be the most important thing you can do for them!

Marty Rossman, former associate professor of family education at the University of Minnesota, did a survey of children who had assumed an active role in family chores, starting at age three or four, and how it influenced their ability to become well-adjusted young adults.

Rossman worked with unused data collected by Diana Baumrind, a well-known researcher on parenting styles. Baumrind con-



ducted her study, using a sample of California families over a twenty-five-year period.

Rossmann did a secondary analysis of the unused data collected by Baumrind and saw an enormous amount related to children's involvement in household tasks. Rossmann analyzed eighty-four young adults based on their parents' style of interacting, and their participation in family tasks at three periods in their lives: ages three to four, nine to ten and fifteen to sixteen. She did brief phone interviews with them when they were in their mid-twenties. She used parenting styles, gender, types of household tasks, time spent on tasks, attitudes, and motivators associated with doing the tasks - to determine their impact on children. She measured each individual's successes and looked at the outcomes when they were in their mid - twenties. She focused on what they were doing in regards to completing their education or getting started on a career path, their relationships with family and friends, and whether or not they were using drugs. She also considered IQ's in her analysis.

Rossmann was surprised with the results. One would think that IQ and motivation would have a strong bearing on success, but she found these don't matter as much as partici-

pating in household tasks. She analyzed it and re-analyzed it and still came to the same conclusion.

The study showed that when a parent waited to start their children on tasks at ages nine, ten, or fifteen to sixteen, the children thought the parent was asking them to do something they didn't want to do. They were far too self-centered and didn't understand the concept of working together as a family. Thus, the earlier parents train their children to take an active role in the household, the easier it will be to get them involved as teenagers.

**CHILDREN HAVE NEVER  
BEEN GOOD AT LISTENING  
TO THEIR ELDERS, BUT  
THEY HAVE NEVER FAILED  
TO IMITATE THEM.**

*James Baldwin*

Learning to clean may be even more critical than reading, writing or arithmetic, because if the only thing a child knows when he graduates from high school is "I am responsible for myself and my life," he will succeed.

If you allow and accept sloppy standards and poor

habits in your children at home, it will carry over into writing, speaking and other areas of their life. How they clean will be how they live.

Mark Simone head of the Navy Seals, says, “The first thing they teach a new Seal is to make his bed correctly and to make it the first thing in the morning. If the Seal has a bad day, at least they come home to a made bed and the knowledge they have done something right that day.” Teaching yourself to do one thing right every day, leads to doing another thing right, and the list just keeps on growing.

I hope this research, convinces you start teaching your children to clean, and to make it a priority in your life. Now, let’s get busy getting you some help around the house and making sure your child has a bright future.

# DON'T YELL — TEACH

## *Tactics*

**Threats** - are the most common and least effective tactic parents can use to teach their children responsibility. No one likes to be ordered to do something.

**Yelling** - “Go clean your room” won’t get the room cleaned. Children can’t be asked to do something they haven’t been trained to do. I have seen children’s rooms I didn’t want to clean and I am a professional housecleaner! The bed is pushed against the wall, making it almost impossible to make. Some beds are decorated with dust ruffles, creating difficulty when trying to change the sheets. Or worse yet, they have bunk beds, a housecleaner’s worst nightmare!



Children need lots of baskets, bins and places to put their “stuff”. Even if their closet is small, storage containers will help keep it organized. Trust me, if you only do these two things - make the bed accessible and give them lots of containers, you will find their room will stay cleaner.

***Setting an example*** - is one of the best ways to get your children to help around the house. If you complain about housework and neglect your home, they will do the same. When you tell your children one thing and you do something else, you give them a double message. Children pay attention to what you do. One of the worst things parents can do is to criticize each other about housework. Parents should treat each other with respect, even if they have different standards regarding housekeeping.

***The martyrdom mode*** - Besides “Go clean your room” I believe that “Nobody helps me around here” and “Why do I have to do everything” are the most often heard complaints in a family household. The truth of the matter is, if your children aren’t helping you clean, it’s your fault. You are not taking the time to teach them basic cleaning skills, which you will regret later on in life.

***Excuses*** - Parents have many excuses for not teaching their children to clean:

- The children are too little. (If a child can pick up a remote, turn on a television and select a channel, they can learn to clean.)
- The children have too much homework. (You are busy also; they need to share)
- The children are too involved in sports. (Parents need to keep things in balance)
- I can do it faster. (Just think how fast cleaning could be done with everyone helping)
- I can do it better. (Standards are necessary, but you

might be surprised at how well they will do in a short time with supervision.)

One of the excuses I hear a frequently is, “I’m busy and I have to pick my battles.” I hope that after reading the research on children and cleaning, you realize how important it is for your child’s future and choose the cleaning, as one of your battles.

***Don’t criticize*** – this is the surest way to discourage anybody from wanting to help you. Telling them their work isn’t satisfactory, especially in public no matter how you say it makes them feel like they don’t measure up. On the other hand, don’t tell them they have done a great job when they haven’t, this just enforces bad habits.

***Discuss it*** – When something isn’t just right, discuss it and lead them through the redo. Children need to have the proper equipment and training. So, you must start by showing them exactly what you want done and how it should look when they are finished.

For example: When I taught my daughter how to make a bed, I showed her how to make the bed and what I expected it to look like when she was finished. I asked if there was anything she didn’t understand and then left her alone to do it herself. I returned to the room after fifteen minutes and we assessed her work I didn’t criticize -I just asked her if she thought the bed looked like it should and if not, how she could improve upon it. We discussed her suggestions; we took the bed apart, and I left her alone once again to make the corrections. It took three attempts, but when we were

finished, she could make a bed like a pro, and she was very proud of her work. In fact, I caught her several times showing her friends how to make a bed. I could have accepted the bed the way she made it and praised her for trying, but the result would not have been the same. Knowing they can handle themselves without someone directing is very motivating. When you suggest a lesson, say to your child “I’d like to teach you this skill so you can take care of yourself when you’re on your own.”

***Condescending tone*** - When teaching skills make sure your tone isn’t condescending and always try to explain the benefits of doing something a certain way. Such as, separating the clothes before washing them to prevent colors from bleeding onto other clothes.

***Show them*** - You need to show them how it’s done and let them take it from there. You would be surprised at how much kids already know about cleaning. It’s better to teach one thing at a time. A child’s attention span is short, and you want them to learn to do things correctly.

***A beginning and an end*** - Children need to see a beginning and an end to chores. This is also true of most husbands. If you tell your family that Saturday is going to be a spring cleaning day you might find yourself alone on Saturday morning. It’s better to explain that you need their help on Saturday and everyone needs to spend three hours doing their part to help keep the family home clean. Assign designated chores to each family member.

Write the tasks on a sheet of paper to pass out on Saturday morning. Each person needs to understand what is expected of them. Make sure you have all the necessary equipment and supplies to complete the jobs; nothing is more frustrating than having to wait for someone to run to the store to pick up forgotten items.

**Standards** - As your children grow older you may find that your idea of a clean room is a little different than theirs. To resolve this issue, ask them to write a job description for their room. After they write their job description discuss how their ideas are different and why. It will help them understand the reason for your standards and you in return will learn more about how they feel about their room.

LOVING A CHILD DOESN'T  
MEAN GIVING IN TO ALL  
HIS WHIMS; TO LOVE HIM  
IS TO BRING OUT THE  
BEST IN HIM, TO TEACH  
HIM TO LOVE WHAT IS  
DIFFICULT.

*Nadia Boulanger*

Talking about ideas is a great way to compromise. You must believe that your children are capable and let them discover it themselves, a little bit at a time.

***Clean the community*** - Take your kids on community cleanup days. After they clean up a five-mile stretch of highway, they will think twice before throwing something out of the window of a car. This experience will carry over to their room, home, and yard.

***Associated cleaning*** - Ask the question; "What do you want to be when you grow up?" If they say a nurse or doctor, explain how people in that profession must keep everything around them in a sanitary condition to prevent infection. Whatever the occupational choice, show how neatness and cleanliness connect with the job.

***Reinforce*** - Never fail to point out messy or disorderly things. You can do this while driving, walking or just visiting a mall. It can be something as simple as an overflowing trash container. Let them know how disappointing it is to see and how sad it makes you feel for other people to see this.

Likewise, when you are in a beautiful, clean park or building, express your happiness at seeing how everything is kept up so well and how good that makes you feel. This will help them to connect cleanliness with good feelings.

***Personal Cleanliness*** - Keep enforcing the idea that being neat and clean has personal benefits. Say things like; "Notice you feel better." "Your toys last longer when they are taken care of." "You can find things easier." Use every opportunity to stress the importance of cleanliness.

***Praise*** - When a child does a good job of cleaning, compliment, compliment, compliment! But, only if it is a good job.

***Reward*** - Giving rewards for cleaning, does work, if you do it right. The important thing is to think through the re-

ward before you offer it and follow through afterward. Often, when we are in a hurry, we offer a reward just to get the job done and later we are unable to fulfill our promise. Breaking a promise is not a good example for a child. They lose trust in the parent and are less apt to help out next time it is needed.

**Guilt** - The last tactic is guilt. Never use this one. It goes like this. "You will be sorry someday when I'm dead and gone." Or "What if you didn't have a mother and father to tell you what to do?" Imagine how this must make a child feel? A child will sometimes use guilt to get something from you like "John's mom bought him a new bike why can't you get me one?" Don't fall into that trap, guilt shouldn't be used by parent or child.



## THE SECRETS OF HOW

### Getting the Job Done

You've read all the reasons, and hopefully, I've convinced you that teaching your children to clean is the most important thing you can do for them. But, I can hear you saying "How am I going to accomplish this?" It's not as hard as you think. It will take a little patience, but the payoff is well worth it.

### Real Tools

First, read through the **cleaning tools and supplies list** to make sure you have what you need to begin your teaching lessons. They need real tools to do a good job. When my granddaughter was four, my daughter gave her the cut-

est little toy vacuum cleaner. After playing with it for a few minutes she informed her mother that it didn't work, it wasn't picking up dirt.

You can't fool the kids. They see these machines advertised on television and know what they can do.

Between the ages of three and six you should plug and unplug any electrical equipment



such as vacuums into sockets for them, but after six they can handle that procedure also. Imagine their excitement to be able to use your cleaning tools!

You have real tools, you need real cleaning solutions, check out the **natural cleaning recipe** page. Children can have a lot of fun making these solutions. You will need to supervise, at least until they become familiar with making them. Provide them several kinds of essential oils to choose from; peppermint, tea tree, and wintergreen are excellent choices. When mixed and used correctly, these cleaning solutions are safe for your family and the environment. **Be sure to follow the directions regarding the masks when working with fine powders.** You can pretend you are concocting magic potions!

### **Make it Fun!**

Inexpensive accessories can be fun. You can create badges for them to wear and pretend they work for a cleaning company. Give them a unique shirt or a cute little apron with their name on it. I have directions on the natural cleaning recipe page for making an apron out of a plastic garbage bag. Provide a small notepad, so they can leave you a pretend bill when they have finished cleaning.

When children are small, they love to help around the house. Cleaning at this time can be taught with fun and games. They love to mimic their parents, so watching you clean is a good experience for them and can also be an ex-

cellent bonding time. Too many times when parents want to clean the house, their first thought is to get the children out of the way so they can get it done quickly. The plan should be; what skill can I teach my child today.

As children mature, you will need to move from fun and games to work incentive programs. They will have realized that cleaning is work. But we will discuss that a little later on in the book.

### **You're Almost There!**

You have your tools and cleaning supplies there is one more thing you need to do before you start cleaning. Make the area cleanable. You need to go into the room and look at it from a cleaner's point of view.

**WE WORRY ABOUT  
WHAT A CHILD WILL  
BE TOMORROW, YET  
WE FORGET THAT HE  
IS SOMEONE TODAY.**

*Stacia Tausche*

I have watched many parents spend a lot of time and money decorating their children's rooms and after it's all finished, the child moves in, makes the place a mess and the parents shut the door until the child goes off to college. If they had only put more thought into how cleanable it would be, they might have enjoyed the room a lot more.