

Teaching Children to Clean: Lessons Learned from a Mom



You may be familiar with the “Telephone Game” where the first player will whisper a statement in the second player’s ear and down the line it goes until the last player says, out loud, the statement and everyone laughs because, while it may have a shadow of the original statement, it isn’t close to it. Well, here is my “telephone game” version of cleaning. Years ago, I attended a seminar on organization. Afterwards I overheard a friend who mention the words “FlyLady method and 15 minutes. Much like the telephone game, I took the what I “heard” my friend say and started using the ideas in my own home. Following is my “telephone game” version of cleaning and it only takes 15 minutes a day.

- Start when your children are young. You can start by asking very young children to pick up a toy and hand it to you for you to put away. Small children love to be involved, so make a game of it.
- Pre-school through grade 2. Instead of telling them, “Go clean your room”, go with them and help them clean their room. I found out early, as a mom, if I gave each child a verbal list of what to do it didn’t happen. The child

enters their room where multiple toys and dirty clothes are strewn about resulting in it being overwhelming to them and they won't know where to start, so they don't. They sit down amongst the clutter and play or shove it all under the bed. This is where a little positive parental time will provide big dividends. You join the child cleaning, sit by the toy box and have the child pick up and bring the toys to you, then move to the next item, say, dirty clothes. Tackle each category individually. Soon the room is clean and as long as no yelling occurred, everyone is happy and feels accomplished.

- Now for the rest of the house and ages. Make a list of what you would like cleaned in each room of your house. For example, you may select the living room and determine you would like the floor vacuumed, furniture and lamps dusted, baseboards cleaned, and cobwebs removed. Create a cleaning wish list for each room that can be checked off, drawn out of a hat, or visually referenced.
- Assign one or two rooms (depending on the size of the room), each day, to be cleaned (Monday-Livingroom, Tuesday-Kitchen...you get the idea). I divided the rooms in my home to clean during the week in order to have the weekend free. Gather all family members and let each person select items from your cleaning wish list to clean in the room of the day.

There are things that won't be cleaned every week but, at least once a month everything in each room will be cleaned. This was life changing for my family. Yes, my children grumbled about cleaning at first but once they realized I was serious that it would only take 15 minutes they became willing participants.

References

Cilley, M. 2002. *Sink Reflections*, Bantam Books.