

Housework Help For a Harried Mother

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 3 August, 2003 - 09:50

In a discussion about keeping your house clean without keeping your kids in cages, Rowina **wrote** (<http://pub3.ezboard.com/fsageparentingfrm13.showMessage?topicID=24.topic>) about what a difficult issue cleaning has been for her:

I want to keep the house clean, but at eleven or midnight, I don't want to clean it. And when I say want, I mean really, REALLY want to, to the point of being anxious if I do something else (computer, bed) instead of cleaning. It has taken me months to get a point where I can even begin to consider the dilemma rationally. And it is precisely this that motivates me--I do NOT want my kids to feel this way about cleaning! Or anything! EVER!

The article on the old TCS website about cleaning really helped me change my perspective.

Feeling ghastly about housework is horribly common, and wanting not to cause your children to grow up having the same conflicts is a commendable start. I hope that anyone in this situation will be able to move beyond that to replace the horrible intractable conflicts, anxiety and self-sacrifice with the peace of actually solving these problems. As one who has been there and come out the other side, thanks to insights gleaned from fellow TCS folks, I have a lot to say about this, so lookout for another article on this soon. In the meantime, here is the piece Rowina found helpful. It is by **Starlene Stewart**, and was originally posted on the **TCS List** on Sun, 3 Jan 1999 13:37:20 -0800. In a discussion about keeping your house clean without keeping your kids in cages, Rowina **wrote** (<http://pub3.ezboard.com/fsageparentingfrm13.showMessage?topicID=24.topic>) about what a difficult issue cleaning has been for her:

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Starlene Stewart

Jodi Rhinehart wrote:

I have a question about raising young children... How would the average TCS parent deal with the everyday living with three little ones? For example, the house is never clean and is impossible to keep up with.

Hi Jodi,

I live in a home that is never clean and impossible to keep up with. :) I personally strongly dislike doing housework. I find myself wondering why I *have* to be like a neat/tidy person. After all, I don't expect people with clean houses to adhere to having a messy house like mine. Obviously, having a clean home is low on my priority list.

Before having children my home was mildly cluttered, dishes were always piled up in the sink, any flat surface piled with things that didn't have a home. After I had kids, the mess tripled. People tell me that I have to *make* my kids clean up after themselves, but I knew I wasn't consistent enough to clean up after myself so how could I stay on top of my kids and bully them into cleaning up after themselves when I couldn't?

There is a theory that some people are born neat and others are born disorganised. There are books on how to conquer the messiness. I tend to question why I, someone born disorganised, has to change who I am to be like someone I'm not. I have a friend whose home looks like a showcase. I've been present while she berates and badgers her children about any little mess they have made. She admits to being obsessive about keeping her home clean. People like me, with messy homes are assumed to be sick mentally. I have lost friends when they saw my mess. OTOH, some would speculate that having a clean home is a way to hide one's dysfunctions and project the appearance of perfection.

I like the born neat and born disorganised theory; I think it's possible. I also believe the coercion theory. Coercing people to do one thing when they would prefer to be doing something else will cause thinking damage in that specific area of their thinking. I find it interesting that as a child I was not required to do laundry and I was realising the other day that when clothes need to be cleaned, I just gather them up from all over the floor everywhere and start the washer. I have to walk about 200 feet to the community clothesline area to hang the clothes and I just do it. I don't love it, I don't hate it, I just simple do it. Now with dishes, OTOH, which I was traumatised in regards to as a child, I really have to gear up to do them. I put off washing dishes for as long as I can, which is usually long after there are no clean utensils, plates, pots/pans, etc. Sometimes we get by with paper plates, but those are sometimes more of a nuisance since the garbage can seems to be invisible to everyone, including me. :) I have another friend who loves to keep her home clean and she has two older sisters whose homes are very messy. As a child, this friend was the baby of the family and was never made to do housework, OTOH, her older sisters were the "maids" and did all the housework. This friend never makes her own children clean house, because she feels they will grow up and find it easy to keep their own homes clean if they aren't forced to do housework as children like her sisters were.

Every time Mum tries to clean, she has three mini tornadoes following her around and undoing everything she does.

I can totally relate. Pre-TCS I actually caught myself feeling like people were consciously working to mess up what I'd just cleaned. I like Rane's idea of having a team of mums rotate and clean homes.

The way it works around here is I get one room cleaned up and then everyone relishes in the cleanliness of that room and it becomes the new hangout until it's a mess again. :)

The children couldn't care less if the house is messy and leave clothes wherever they happen to land,

Actually, most of the time *I* seem to care less if the house is messy and you should see the clothes all over the floor in our house that belong to me. I have to admit though that I'm not in the practice of stripping down until bedtime so usually it's only my bedroom floor that is littered with my clothing. Other family members find clothing confining and are less inhibited than I, and often strip entering the house. I wonder if putting more clothes hampers around would help. I'll tell you what works exceptionally well for clothing hampers/baskets. Those nasty expensive plastic ones always break within a couple months use. The ones I have I found in the garbage bins where I live. But what I was going to say is to go to your local grocer and ask the vegetable department person if they will save fruit boxes for you. Banana boxes work *great* for clothing baskets.

Usually stores give these away for free, so the cost is perfect and they last forever. :) So maybe you could get a bunch of banana boxes and put one in every room. One in the living room, one in the bathroom, one in each bedroom, one in the kitchen. At the very least, it would be easier for you, mum, to toss discarded clothing into the nearest box. As an aside, orange and apple boxes are also wonderful for storing things.

throw food behind the couch (apples, bananas, half-eaten sandwiches etc...

You know what happens more often here is that people don't throw these things behind the couch, but the couch has a space underneath it and things get tossed on the floor in front of the couch and they get shoved back under the couch. If you think people are actually tossing things behind the couch could you put a couple garbage cans back there to catch some of the debris? Or, what about a garbage can placed strategically on both sides of the couch? I have recently started using two garbage cans, one in the kitchen and one in the kids' room, which is working better. I think we could even use more trash cans around the house.

We also seem to have piles of half-eaten food piled up under beds...

A flaw in having the extra garbage cans and clothing hampers around would be to assume people *will* use them, and get upset or mad at people if they don't.

Mum doesn't expect a spotless house at all times, but a nice, mildly lived-in look would be nice occasionally.

I can't say if this is true for you, but for me, "nice, mildly lived-in" is very difficult to attain. A lot of that is because I don't choose to spend time cleaning every day. I have many other things to spend my days doing, and I admit that sometimes many days go by that I don't do more than 15 minutes housework a day. If I could coerce myself into cleaning for 2 hours a day I could probably stay on top of things, but I don't choose to spend my time in that way. I mostly work with my 'urges to clean, which don't come often.

Actually though, as a result of totally not coercing myself to clean (for about 12-18 months) I've been able to clean without it being an issue for me. Also, I have a friend whose children starting helping to clean up without it being an issue when they were 10-12 and now that one of mine is in that age bracket I am often finding the dishes have been put away without my ever having asked, or the bathroom cleaned, or dishes gathered up from a bedroom and brought into the kitchen. If I am cleaning the kitchen, I will ask to have the dishes in the drainer put away and usually the dishes are cheerfully put away.

One thing I have to remember is if I ask people to help and they don't want to, I shouldn't get offended by their honesty. After all, if I were busy doing something and suddenly a family member got an urge to clean house and asked me to wash the dishes I should be able to say I don't feel like it right now, I'll do it when I feel like it.

Dad gets really uptight when the house is a mess. It seems to really affect his moods although he doesn't help alot around the house.

When he does, there is alot of mumbling about living in a pig sty and getting really sick of this etc. etc.

This, we don't have in common. I am a single parent and don't have to worry about another adult disliking the mess. The option of another adult helping is completely removed, so I also feel no resentment that I'm doing most of the cleaning myself.

About all I can offer in this scenario is perhaps Dad could have a room all of his own that he could maintain the level of cleanliness that is important to him all on his own. I don't know if you have a family bedroom, or if you and your husband share a bedroom alone. If you have a family bedroom, it's probably as messy as every place in your home. But if you have a bedroom of your own then perhaps this room could become Dad's haven and you could both agree to a level of cleanliness in this room that you are both comfortable with.

The household just seems to be completely full of chaos. When the house is clean (after Nana visits)

Is this because you clean like a mad demon so Nana won't be upset? Or does Nana clean while she's there and make everything tidy and neat and keep it that way? Can Nana come over once a week and clean?

the whole attitude of everyone in the house changes and the home seems so cosy and warm.

This is what happens when I clean a single room.

There isn't enough money to hire a maid.

What about bartering with someone? Maybe a college student who needs use of a computer and printer and they would help clean for an hour for time on your computer? Or some other bartering option?

Mum stays home fulltime with the kids who are ages 6 1/2, 3 1/2, and 18 mos. and also unschools so is very busy just playing and interacting with the kids.

Your children are all quite young. They will grow up so fast. You will be so happy that you spent this time with them. :) You definitely have your hands full with your children. No wonder your house is a mess. It is going to be. I just realised the other day that the reason our house wasn't a mess when I was a kid was because all of us children were coerced into cleaning!! I overheard a (non-TCS) parent just the other day telling another (TCS) parent that she doesn't do housework and her house is never messed up because she just *makes* her kids clean it up!

Is there an option of Dad taking the kids to someplace fun so you can have a couple hours to concentrate on cleaning? Perhaps Dad can run some errands with the children along while you can get some cleaning done?

Does anyone else agree that TCS is really hard work when you have more than one child and young ones at that?

Absolutely.

Mum is not the disciplined cleaning type

That's okay. You don't *have* to be a “disciplined cleaning type.” You are you. If you really find a clean house of great priority you will either clean it, or find someone to clean it, or you will find a way to live comfortably in your home.

and attributes some of this to the fact that her mum cleaned her room for her when she was a child and never showed her how to keep house. It was all done for her. (Do you think there is any truth to this?)

First of all, were you homeschooled?? Or were you in school for many hours a day? Did your mum actually bar you from your room while she cleaned?

I will assume you were in school all day. Children who are in school all day don't get to see what goes into cleaning up a house. I think your children will learn to clean house from your example, no matter how seldom you do it. My children see my little routine that I've worked out. When I am going to clean a room, I enter the room with a box for dishes, a box for clothing, a garbage can with a bag in it (and more bags!) and a box for toys.

Sometimes I also bring in the empty toolbox to put all the tools away, too. :) My oldest has already picked up my routine and when he starts cleaning his room he does the same thing I do. Interestingly enough, when he starts cleaning I suddenly feel very much like cleaning also and I pitch in to help. It often takes 5-6 hours of steady work to clean this 12x10 room, to help describe just how messy it gets. 3 loads of laundry from the floor, 2-30 gallon bags of debris, 2 banana boxes of dishes... I admit, it would be really nice if I could be more consistent about keeping my home clean. But I am not.

I used to think I couldn't be consistent about *anything* but then I realised that wasn't true, because if something is actually important enough to me to be consistent about it, I will be. An example would be when we used to go to the public swimming pool. It would take concentrated consistency for the first couple weeks to help my oldest learn the pool rules. And I would do it, then I could relax.

Some people might say, “See, you could *relax* after you were consistent for a couple weeks, so why not do this with cleaning your home?” Well, it isn't the same thing! Learning to follow a few rules at the public pool is nothing like the daily hours it would take to keep our house clean.

I hope you and your family is able to work out something that everyone is happy with.

Good luck!

Starlene, First of all... WOW! Thanks for that long and supportive response. Regarding Rane's idea, I do have a friend coming over on Thursday to help clean my house. She is bringing her laundry since she doesn't have a washer and dryer. I have also babysat her kids many times. (She has only watched my kids once, but because of our differences of opinion regarding raising children and the fact that one of my boys came out crying that he didn't want to eat his Mac and cheese and that she was making him sit at the table all by himself to finish, she will NEVER babysit my kids again... so I guess she owes me some favours, although I hate to think of it that way since I enjoy helping others when I can.) ...

Thank you for the suggestions and encouragement. I'm going to try to work something out with my friend with swapping babysitting for cleaning once a month or something.

[to post comments](#)

Comments

I love TCS!

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 6 August, 2003 - 12:52

One of the really attractive things about the TCS philosophy is the way the people interested in it seem to apply so much imagination and creativity to what, for most people, is simply the daily grind.

Nothing is un-optimisable!

[to post comments](#)

what if you Have to have the house clean

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 24 August, 2003 - 04:51

Wow! I loved your article. That sounds just like my house (except we don't own that many dishes - my mom taught me the trick of not owning more dishes than you absolutely need, then you clean them up sooner) My problem is that I don't own my own house, can't even pay rent, so am living in this house out of someone else's kindness, and they want it clean. Also city is getting on our case about the yard. Personally the obsession people have with mowed lawns has always confused me. They're so beautiful when they get long. And they want me to Kill the morning glories with Poison! Morning glories are my favorite flower next to dandelions! Besides that, I have 3 kids under 4 who practically live outside. I dream of one day living in my own house in the country where people can't judge me so easily. By the way, the "daddy's room" thing really works Except for he always wants a pathway out of his room, to, say, the front door. Also, he literally starts loosing it when the kitchen gets to bad and smelly and full of flies. The problem with having laundry boxes all over the house isn't getting stuff in them, it is keeping it in them once its been put in once or twice. Both my kids that can walk, love to clean. I had come to the conclusion it was hereditary, because they certainly didn't learn it from me. This is sometimes a problem, as my 2 yr. old will pull up a chair to the sink and do dishes, and I don't like her touching the mouldy stuff. Also, I find this one more cute than annoying, if I leave something in the middle of the floor too long, then put it away, they will put it back in the middle of the floor because in their minds that is where it goes - they are putting it away :) My real problem is that They enjoy the house better when its clean, and I don't think they quite make the connection yet with each little thing they do all day long and it being clean. I don't even know if they realize they like it clean. But they're so much happier when it's clean and they can actually find their toys And have room to play with them. But the only time I have to clean is sleap time, and then I'm short tempered with them the next day, or don't want to take them to the park when they are in danger of hurting themselves if I don't; or the only

other time I have is if I clean while they scream. Yes we can clean together, but there are so many things I don't want them exposed to, I feel a need to "ready" something like dishes, before they can help me. I would love any suggestions. Thanks

to post comments

A suggestion

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 26 September, 2003 - 02:22

Try Flylady for help with cleaning : <http://www.flylady.net> (<http://www.flylady.net>) - she specifically **insists** you don't badger the kids into cleaning, quite a TCS attitude. They are only to help with cleaning if they **want** to do it. You use routines for yourself to make cleaning fun and easy. It's a site for people who were born disorganised (like me !!).

to post comments

new jersey reporter seeking local tcs families?

Submitted by lbrody01 on 14 October, 2003 - 20:23

Hi. I cover children and family issues for The Record, a northern NJ daily newspaper, and I am fascinated by TCS. If you live in northern NJ and follow TCS ideas and practices, please contact me at brody@northjersey.com. Many thanks, Leslie Brody. (P.S. I understand some of you may be wary of reporters. Please know that I am not a hit-and-run "gotcha" reporter. I am interested in researching serious, careful, illuminating articles. Thanks again.)

to post comments

Too many material objects...

Submitted by universatile on 16 January, 2005 - 22:07

I think a great part of the trouble keeping up tidyness has to do with material object overload. For goodness sake if you have too much clutter get rid of some stuff. It's like being reborn. Spartanism is a true art, learning to live with the most necessary things and forgoing the rest.

I have an aunt who is under constant stress, between jobs, three kids, a boyfriend etc. One of her biggest problems in my opinion is just too much stuff! And guess what, she still walks in the door almost everyday with new crap. All the food she buys is packaged. The girls have books they haven't read in a year.

I feel it is healthy to ask yourself and be real about answering the question, "Do I really need all this stuff?"

How many times can someone watch a movie over and over again before getting bored with it? Perhaps I should get rid of the movie collection and go to the library if I want to watch a flick.

to post comments

Clean house, clean kids

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 9 August, 2006 - 16:12

Come on people - keeping your house clean and keeping your children clean is just a basic rule of life. If you can't master these simple things, I would question your ability to do anything really well. All this hogwash about spending time with your children and because of that, not having the time or the energy to simply clean up after yourself is laziness, pure and simple. An hour or less a day cleaning and picking up doesn't take away from those precious moments with the kids and it does keep you and them from having to live in a pig sty. Quit spending so much time complaining about it and just do it! Believe it or not, none of us "like" housework, even those whose homes are "showcases." The unpleasant work still has to be done, and finding a thousand excuses not to do it reflects poorly on you and - no matter how many times you use the excuse that you would rather have happy children - a filthy home is an extremely poor example to them and an unhealthy atmosphere in which to raise them. So ask yourself now - aren't you really just using the children as an excuse? If you really love and care for them, keep the nest clean for goodness sake! It's simply not healthy not to! And while we're on the subject - keep the kids clean too. A daily bath or shower is a necessity for active children. None of these basic chores is that difficult or time-consuming. Just do it!

[to post comments](#)

i found reading articles on

Submitted by carrie (not verified) on 18 August, 2006 - 01:56

i found reading articles on this website very encouraging. Most of the people I know are extremely organised when it comes to house cleaning, and force their children to do the same. I actually found that after reading these articles that I felt more positive while doing housework, & I feel that the fact that I'm disorganized makes me feel unique. I don't have to live up to their expectations of a tidy home.

[to post comments](#)

5kids and a messy messy house

Submitted by Crystal (not verified) on 3 September, 2006 - 00:50

What advice do you have for a SAHM with 5 kids, whose house is a wreck?! They will be moving into a much larger house but cannot move into that home for another 6 months or so. How to survive the cluttered, chaotic mess? How to get the family to help with the simple chores like wiping down the kitchen table or putting trash in the trash can? Is it too much to ask for help folding the 20 plus loads of laundry a week. Got some help?!

[to post comments](#)

I love TCS, too!

Submitted by mammal_mama on 24 January, 2007 - 22:34

There are usually so many things I'd rather do than clean. And we're hardly ever sick here, so maybe all the messy-house germs are good for us.

Susan

[to post comments](#)

Clean house and clean

Submitted by gordman (not verified) on 24 September, 2007 - 13:28

Clean house and clean children? Well I am not an expert but at least I do my best. Children are a huge responsibility and I am sorry that many people don't see things that way. My mother was obsessed with cleaning she had her house full of appliances: washers, and so on. I am not saying we should all have this obsession but some little extra care wouldn't harm specially for our kids.

[to post comments](#)

they did it for ages

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 12 July, 2008 - 21:09

I know people with large families that live in small places. there were a mother with 6 kids living in a one room studio and their space was clean all the time. the older ones took pride in keeping it clean. they had a small kitchen small bathroom and a small front room. two twin beds.

[to post comments](#)

Put the toys away.

Submitted by Willow on 19 December, 2008 - 20:54

This morning I was told by my 2-year-old to put the animals in the box. This was completely unprompted, so I joined in and we did a tiny bit of tidying together.

We have clear plastic boxes for toys, which live on shelves so that the children can see what's in them and reach them and they are easy to tidy.

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