



The Messy Bedroom

What should you do when your child's bedroom looks like it's been put through a blender? Clothes, toys and last week's snack wrappers litter the floor. Your child doesn't care, but you do. A parental temper tantrum can result in one clean day, but the mess magically reappears.

Here are four ideas:

Organize. If the room has reached the point of a national disaster, the mess will be overwhelming for your child. At this point, it's best if you help with the initial clean up. Use plenty of boxes, baskets and tubs to sort clothes and belongings. Label each container clearly (socks, books, Legos, etc.) Initiate a daily clean up time to prevent the buildup of another mess. Inspect every day. At that point use the "When/Then" approach, "When your room is clean, then you may go out to play."

Contract. Sit down with your child to develop a bedroom cleaning contract. Agree to what constitutes a "clean room" in very specific terms, such as: clothes in closet, folded or on hangers, books on shelf, stuffed animals on top bunk, etc. Choose a specific day of the week for cleaning. A schedule that works well for many families is to require a clean room on Saturday, prior to any activities or playtime. Agree to a consequence for failure to meet the contract terms, such as loss of a privilege until the room is clean. Write up the contract and have everyone sign agreement. Post it and follow through.

Pack it up. At a time when your child is away from home invest the time to do a more-than-thorough cleaning. Using baskets, boxes and shelves neatly arrange the necessities and most favorite toys. Pack 90% of the stuff that litters the floor into small boxes. Store the boxes in the garage or attic. Display your child's beautifully clean room and let her know that she can earn back one box at a time at the end of each week that the room is kept clean. Expect a major tantrum, but stick to your guns. If a neat bedroom is your goal, this should put you on the right track.

Pick your battles. If your child is age twelve or older, and a basically responsible kid, turn his bedroom over to him as practice for his first apartment experience. Lay down the basic rules, such as: the bed linens must be changed weekly, the rug must be vacuumed, food must be removed daily, etc. Pile any of his laundry or stray belongings by his door. Let him know that if the basic rules are followed he'll be in charge of his own room. And if you can't stand the mess, shut the door.

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *Kid Cooperation* and *Perfect Parenting*