

# Children's Decluttering and Organising Hints and Tips

## Behaviour Changing – the child

**The hare and the tortoise:** children are all very different. You will not convince your child to let go of toys if they are a tortoise and you are trying to hurry them along as though they were a hare.

- Accept that change will be a longer term challenge
- work on it slowly
- set small goals
- establish a whole-household approach to clearing out unwanted possessions
- do not be tempted to remove and dispose of toys without the child's knowledge or permission. They will notice that the toys have gone and in all likelihood will become more resistant to giving up other toys, as well as becoming less trustful of you.

**Broken and incomplete:** any toy that is broken or has parts missing should be disposed of, unless it can be fixed. Do not be tempted to simply replace the item. Children should learn responsibility for their belongings and take care of them, so automatically replacing something will give the wrong message. However, if the toy or game was broken accidentally and the child plays with it regularly or really loves it, consider replacing it at an appropriate time or encourage them to save up to replace it.

**Lead by example:** if clearing out and donating unwanted items are part of your regular routine and lifestyle your child will pick this up. Have a particular place where you keep the charity box that anyone in the family can access. Perhaps add an incentive to the effect that every time the box becomes full you will do something as a family, eg a trip to the cinema or a walk to the play area.

One note of caution! Be aware that if you have a child who has a particular tendency towards guilt, or a desire to please, you may need to tackle this differently.

**Impulse buys:** the pressure to succumb to a child's pleading in a shop is tough to resist, especially if the item is cheap. Resist; if you don't, buying things will become a habit that the child expects, every trip will become a battle, and your house will fill with stuff. If the child really wants something encourage them to save for it, perhaps doing some household tasks to earn money towards it. The anticipation of buying something adds excitement and if in the act of saving they lose interest then it was clearly never of more than a passing fancy. They will also end up with a greater sense of value and the worth of possessions.

**Out of sight, out of mind:** consider boxing up the toys that your child plays with least often, asking them to help you and to make the decisions. You then have 2 options:

Let them know that you have not got rid of the toys and they are in storage. After 6 months bring the boxes out and rotate the toys with those that they had available over the previous 6 months, checking if there are any that they wish to get rid of.

If the child asks for one of the stored toys get it back out for them, but dispose of all other toys that have remained unasked for at the end of the 6 month period.

## Behaviour changing – everyone else!

**Showing love and valuing the gift...**and so to relatives who always turn up with a gift.

Hard though it is, relatives need to understand that homes only have so much space, and giving a gift every time they see the grandchild, niece or nephew does not benefit the child, or is possibly not even appreciated by the child who already has so much.

Instead you could encourage them to think about activities or experiences that they could offer, whilst spending quality time with the child. What interests does the grandparent or relative have; cooking, craft, knitting, gardening, bird spotting, swimming. We all remember the experiences and relationships of childhood.

**Mum, the worst offender!** You may have fond memories of a child's first teddy, or the jumper than granny knitted little Emma, but if they don't want it anymore, don't fall into the trap of persuading them to keep it.

## The tidy toddler

**The great age debate:** some have the view that young children are not able to tidy for themselves or take responsibility. I am of the view that the earlier you can instil good habits the better...simply make sure that what you are asking is age appropriate for the child. Even a toddler can pick things up and put them in a box.

- Encourage your child to make their own bed as soon as they are able to...it really doesn't matter if the bed looks untidy, but it does get them into good habits. You can encourage them by suggesting that they tuck teddy up in bed for his nap.
- Give them responsibility of their own room. Perhaps just one area to start with, enlarging the area as they get older.

- Make it easy for them to keep the room clear and tidy. If you are redecorating their bedroom ask them how they would like things to be; providing storage/shelves/cupboards that they like, are able to reach, and can use easily.
- Show them how to tidy and put away so that they understand what it means when you tell them to tidy their rooms – how will they know otherwise?

## Fun and other incentives

**10 minute clutter boogie.:** chose some clutter boogie music. Every week play the music at a time to suit the family as a whole, and for the length of the music everybody dances and declutters their stuff for 10 minutes.

**The timer deadline game:** When you need to tidy up toys, make it into a game. Set the kitchen timer to see how many toys can be put away before the timer goes off (as adults you could also join in so that the children see that tidiness is the responsibility of everyone).

**Car boot stall:** ask every member of the family to contribute a set number of unwanted items, for example 10 things. You could throw in the incentive that they can keep the money (encourage them to save it up for one thing they really want rather than letting them loose at the sale to buy a whole load of other stuff that they don't need). Your child won't feel picked on, but it will reduce their stash. Keep having a car boot stall every few months using the 10-item strategy until you've reduced your children's things down to a comfortable level.

**A place for everything and everything in its place:** children will find it much easier to stay tidy and keep their bedroom clear if belongings have a place in which to live. This means providing suitable, and fun, storage. Lots of shops have great ideas for storage containers; hanging toy hammocks, fabric wall pockets, raised beds with storage beneath, and sufficient book shelves.

**A basket of one's own:** keep a basket or box for each child in the main living area so that there is somewhere quick and easy in which toys can be stored at the end of each day. That way you won't be constantly transporting toys, books and games back to the child's room.

**A clean house is everybody's responsibility:** if you always do everything for your children they will assume and learn that this is the way of things and you will be their slave for life! Encourage children to take responsibility from an early age. Make use of a star chart for tasks with rewards earned when targets are reached, perhaps more pocket money, longer on the computer or watching television.

Don't forget that simply saying thank you and giving praise where due is a huge motivator as we all love being thanked and appreciated for our contribution.

**Clearing the decks:** a month or 6 weeks before each birthday or Christmas encourage your child to have a clear out in order to make room for new toys. The thought of new toys may make it easier for a child to let go of old toys.

**The big clear:** set a time once a week when your children clear and clean their rooms. They will soon find that the less they leave out the quicker it takes them to put everything away.

## Moving things on

**Recycle Clothes:** Children grow out of their clothes quickly so ensure that you remove clothes as soon as they stop fitting. Put them in an easily accessible bag for recycling to a charity shop, clothes bank or to sell for profit at an NCT (National Childbirth Trust) clothes sale.

Alternatively, if you have younger children you may want to keep the clothes for them, share them with friends who have children of that age, or organise a clothes swap with other parents.

**Tat box:** numerous small and worthless toys enter the house every week. Fast food toys, party favours, magazine give-aways. Let each child have a small container or box in which all such items are kept. Once the lid ceases to fit the child needs to sort and get rid of something until the lid fits once again. Be clear at the start that this is the deal.

**Listen to your children:** if they say they don't like something, won't wear it, don't want it, then get rid of it...no matter how much you like it.

**Too old to play with:** if a child outgrows a toy get rid of it, pass it onto a younger child or rehome it. Don't keep toys hanging around that your youngest child is now too old for.

**Charity begins at home:** Sit down and have a family meeting. Let everyone know that you want to donate unneeded items to a specific charity. You could ask the children to help you chose which charity the family gives their unwanted things to. Focusing on the generosity of giving may help your child to let go of their old toys and teach them the pleasures of sharing.