



# CLEAN UP TIME!

June 17, 2013 by [Allegra Turner](#)



Clean up time is a very common battle between parents and kids. You say, “It’s time to clean up,” your child pretends that she doesn’t hear you. Or maybe your child frantically starts pulling out all of the other toys from the shelves in a last ditch effort to have fun before the battle begins. Or perhaps “clean up” is a cue for your child to throw himself to the floor and start screaming. It’s true that children with autism have a harder time transitioning from activities and processing instructions, but battles over cleaning up are not unique to the child with autism. Therefore most caregivers can use some tips on how to make cleaning up less of a nightmare.

## **Give a 5 Minute Warning**

This will give your child time to process the fact that he needs to clean up. Also, most children don’t like to be stopped when they are in the middle of doing something important. So let them know when it’s *almost* time to clean up so that they can plan accordingly. If your child knows time is short, he might decide against sending Buzz Light Year on a new mission.



### **Lend a Helping Hand**

Cleaning up can be overwhelming for children so you may need to do most of the work at first. For example, if your child was playing with blocks you can put away most of the blocks and have your child put away one, or a few. Start small, and *gradually* require your child to do more. You can also help by giving specific instructions, such as, “Put the car in the toy box” or “Put your socks in the hamper.”

### **Lots of Praise**

Whatever level your child is starting out at, praise him! Even if she only put away one toy, praise her! If you give your child praise and attention for positive behavior, he or she will engage in more positive behavior in order to get that same praise and attention from you in the future. Also, they will probably start to associate positive behaviors with that warm and fuzzy feeling and sense of accomplishment they felt when you praised them in the past, leading them to become more intrinsically motivated. In other words, at some point they will not need you to praise every little thing they do because task completion in and of itself will be reinforcing.

### **Make it Fun**

If you have a child or work with children, you probably know the “clean up song.” *Clean up, clean up, everybody everywhere, clean up, clean up, everybody do your share!* If you already sing this song, keep it up! If you don’t, well it’s time to start! You can even make up your own. You can also make a game out of cleaning up or race to see who can put away the most toys. Chances are your excitement about cleaning up will rub off on your kid.

### **Follow Through**

It’s important to always follow through with whatever you ask your child to do. For example, if you have asked your child to wash his hands before snack time, then he cannot eat until he has washed his hands—even if you have to help him do it! Likewise, if it’s time to clean up, it’s time to clean up.

Most parents are not consistent *all* the time, but their kids still grow up to be generally compliant, and learn to do whatever needs to be done in life. But consistency is absolutely *crucial* if you have a child with autism or other special needs. Because it takes children with autism longer to grasp certain concepts, and because often times, intrinsic motivation is lacking (which is the reason tangible reinforcement is so effective!) we as parents and teachers need to repeatedly *demonstrate* appropriate behavior, and repeatedly *reinforce* appropriate behavior.

As a last resort, you can administer consequences for refusing to clean up, such as the loss of a privilege, but it’s better to use positive reinforcement as opposed to punishment whenever possible.