

ROOM CLEAN (TEENS AND TOTS)

PARENTING CHALLENGES ★ PAGE 1 OF 1

Teenagers, by definition, are a disaster inside. In no time in their lives are they less secure, more fragile or more confused. Their defiant, often abrasive behavior looks like a demand for instant freedom, when in fact, it is a cry for boundaries and compassion.

If a teenager in your life is NOT trashing his or her life (not taking drugs, doing OK in school and generally following the rules at home) does it really matter if his/her room is a mess?

When my son, Scott, was in Junior High School, he wrote a paper entitled "Why Kids Should Be Able to Keep Their Rooms Messy." His point that kids are controlled everywhere and they should have one place that is their own space, was reasonable to me. I let him live in a pit—with some standards which I periodically enforced.

If you want to set standards for teen neatness, your standards need to be very clear: (1) No plates, glasses or containers with things growing in them are in your room, (2) Clothes go in a hamper (suggest you use a large trash can), (3) Sheets are washed once a week, and (4) any reasonable standard you clearly set and clearly communicate.

How do you enforce room standards?

Parent: "Your ticket to dinner is that all dirty clothes are in the hamper and the clean clothes are put away."

Teen: "Are you saying I can't come to dinner if those things aren't done?"

Parent: "Thank you for listening. Your ticket to dinner is that all dirty clothes are in the hamper and the clean clothes are put away." Then enforce it.

Tots: A small child lives in the moment. Picking up toys to create order is not on a small child's program. Therefore, the parent needs to teach this skill. Whenever possible, turn a chore into a game (Would you rather play a game or do a chore?).

"I am going to set the timer like this. Let's see if you can pick up all the toys in your room before this timer goes "ding!"

Be sure to turn the timer longer than it will take your child to accomplish this task; children like to play games that they win. If a child is winning the helping game, he/she will want to play it again.

Have reasonable standards for small children and teach them HOW to pick up a mess. Have a box that toys can be dumped into—as it is frustrating to a child to have to be really neat while putting toys away. Some toys need special care, and some toys can live all together in the same big box.