

Toy Culling

A few weeks ago, our kids were chronically misbehaving. Our oldest, a tween, was sassing back and saying “no” too much, her younger sister (the “spirited” one) was throwing lots of tantrums and trying to cause trouble with her sisters, and our youngest daughter was constantly upset and insecure about the continuous chaos in the house. Desperate times call for desperate measures, so one day while the oldest kids were at school and the younger ones were sleeping, my husband took off work for an afternoon of “toy culling”. This is a drastic discipline measure we only use in emergency situations. It is time-consuming and intensive labor for the parents, but well worth it, at least in our house.

Toy culling consists of us going into the girls’ room (the three oldest girls share one big room, and our baby boy isn’t yet old enough to cause trouble) and taking out every toy. We leave the tv, computer with educational games, books, and the clothes and board games in the closet. Everything else goes – dressup clothes, doll clothes, dolls, stuffed animals, all the little miscellaneous toys that can really junk up a child’s room quickly, etc. If you have lots of time, you can sort it all by what you want to keep and organize the rest, but we are very busy people and so we just took all their junk and put it in our son’s room for now. He’s a baby who wakes in the night so he’s still in our room. When it’s time to move him into his room, we’ll have to clean it out obviously, but for now it was a means to an end of the horrible behavior of the girls. We leave the board games, and they know that they take one out and put it away when they’re done, just like the books that are left. If the rules aren’t followed, anything that’s left on the floor in subsequent days gets culled. You need to check their room everyday, and it’s **imperitive** that you follow through with rule-enforcing. And for some reason, this process really works. I don’t know what it is... Perhaps a

feng shui effect where the much more pleasant ambience of the room and the *mucho* extra space is what leads to the kids being in better moods and hence, less trouble and more obedient. It could be the fact that there are less toys over which to fight. Maybe they're happier not having it constantly hanging over their heads that they're going to have to clean their room. But I don't care what the reason is, the toy culling has worked wonderfully the 3-5 times we've had to set aside a chunk of time to do it. My kids are now putting their dirty laundry in the hampers that are provided, and their trash is going into garbage cans. Also, their room is staying clean, and I don't have to worry about it staying that way because they don't have anything with which to mess it up! And, as the behavior improves, they can earn their toys back – you don't have to spend money to get them any special reward PLUS the kids feel senses of accomplishment = WIN/WIN. Toy culling proves that less is more, and it helps put a damper on the sense of entitlement that can cloud the good attitude of even a generally well-behaved child.

I think I first read about the method in a parenting column in the newspaper. I'm not sure which expert gets the credit, but I do know that I highly recommend toy culling! And oh yes, early December is a perfect time to do this – makes room for the burst of new things they might receive for the holidays!

Back To School And Redirection

Today is the first day back to school (already?!?), and it's really quiet around here. I guess my oldest two are my loudest two, and we have reduced the traffic in the house by

50% since half the kids are now at school during the day. Thank goodness for school; I'm enjoying myself already. So far, I've gotten two loads of laundry done – folded, put away and everything, and I have somehow also found the time today to put away most of the clutter that's been haunting our dining room table for the last week and a half. I even got to work on my e-book a little bit, and it's not even 1 o'clock! And, the kids at school are learning stuff, getting exercise, and socializing with their friends; they're not vegged out in front of the tv or outside fighting in the wading pool. Everyone wins!

While the oldest 2 kids are in school, I also have time to focus on my toddler, Disney, while her baby brother is napping. Today, I got to sit on the floor and play puzzles with her; something we haven't done together in months, almost a year because of my pregnancy and c-section. And she was down for her nap by 12:30, which not only means some quality time together for me and baby Christopher, but also that my toddler should be to bed at a decent hour tonight. Win-win! While I was on the floor playing with my daughter, I was getting up to tend to the laundry and whatnot. My daughter was following me around the house, and this is where my day becomes challenging – trying to keep our clingy almost 2-year-old out of my husband's home office so he can work. The home office isn't a room where he could close the door and utilize the out-of-sight-out-of-mind tactic. The office is on the landing on our second floor, so if my toddler begins to head up the stairs or even *looks* up the stairs, she sees her best friend, Daddy, and it's over. She tantrums until he holds her, and he can't get any work done. Today she got upstairs and in the clutches of Daddy, so when I chased her down, of course she was upset. But I used one of my favorite child-rearing techniques: redirection. I taught her how to clean the toothpaste off the kids' bathroom counter, which she happily did. We went downstairs for a popsicle, puzzles, and Barney, and all was forgotten. Wow. I had totally forgotten

about the magic of the redirection technique because the last 2-year-old I had in the house was our “spirited” child, Samantha. Sammie was **never** re-directable. She has always been so strong-willed that it’s literally impossible to re-direct the kid, let alone being able to trick her into helping around the house. To this day, she will fight for her cause, whatever it may be, until she gets what she wants or she passes out. And now that she’s older (she’s 4), the crying doesn’t last as long, but she will remember what it is she wanted and bring it up throughout the day (or week or month) until she gets it. So I am actually *enjoying* Disney’s terrible twos a little bit – it’s so refreshing to have a kid who listens. I know, she’s not yet 2 and things could get worse – so much worse. But I’ve been there, done that, and after what Sammie put us through, no wonder Disney seems like a breeze. And even if she does get completely crazy, soon she’ll be old enough to go to school, and we’ll start the terrible twos all over again with Christopher. After 3 tantruming girls in their terrible twos, I’m curious to see what a boy will be like. Probably no big deal, at least compared to Sammie ☐