



# Want to get ADHD Kids to Pick Up Their Things?

## 2 Rules of Thumb

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It's frustrating when your kids leave their things lying around. It takes a lot of cajoling, and sometimes anger, to get the house picked up -- or not. Despite all of your encouragement, threats, and prodding, this scenario repeats itself daily.

When the same problem happens over and over again, something isn't working.

ADHD complicates the situation. It isn't "typical" 8, 11 or 15 year-old behavior. But how do you know whether you should punish, give them a break because of their ADHD, or just give up and move to your in-laws? There are two rules of thumb to guide you:

### Rule #1. **Anticipate.**

Don't expect things to (magically) get better. If the kids haven't gotten it by now, they're not likely to do it any better tomorrow. With ADHD, you don't fix or cure the problem. You recognize the problem, and set up structures to get things working in spite of the ADHD.

Rule #2. **Problem-solve** (and do it with the kids).

Imposing structure on the kids isn't the best way to get their cooperation. When you include them in the problem-solving, you get

their buy-in. It helps them see that you understand and appreciate their concerns. AND, you can actually improve the situation.

Let's see how these two rules might help, both generally, and for the messy-house-syndrome:

### **Anticipate**

With ADHD, sometimes we identify a challenge that is not likely to go away. It's a part of life at your house. So instead of fighting it, expect it to happen. Then, you can explore different ways to find a workable solution.

At a quiet, relaxed time, perhaps during dessert after dinner, say something like,

"I've noticed that we are always fighting about getting things cleaned up around here. What's up with that?"

Be prepared. More than likely the kids will respond that they never get a break, you're always getting on them, or you're interrupting whatever they're doing (TV, gaming, or going out to see their friends). Since this shouldn't be a surprise, there's no need to be defensive.

Try a new tact. Listen. When you respond, use empathy (it goes a long way). Try for example,





“Oh, so it bothers you that I ask you to clean up while you are in the middle of whatever you are doing! I guess I’d be frustrated too. Well, I’m concerned that if I don’t get on you, nothing will ever get cleaned up.”

### **Problem-Solve**

Now that you’ve set the stage for cooperative problem-solving, ask questions like:

- What do you think we can do?
- How can we get things picked up without you feeling like it’s always in the middle of things?
- What tends to work for you?

Once you have the kids talking and making suggestions, be open to try something different. Remember, the old way wasn’t working. It’s possible that they won’t have any ideas, or that their ideas are unrealistic. But they might also have some ideas worth trying. Try them for a week, and evaluate how they work. You will see that there is a lot less frustration around the house, and it becomes easier to work out the problem. It won’t be such a battle anymore.

### **A Tidy Idea**

For an example, here’s an idea that I have found very useful for cleaning the house. It won’t work for every family, but it’s worth a try

to see if it can help yours. It can get the house picked up and reduce everyone’s frustration.

Agree to avoid talking to the kids during the afternoon about cleaning up. It is agreed, though, that you will set an alarm at 5 p.m. every day. At that time, all activities come to a halt while you and the kids go through the house and pick up and clean up all the messes. No TV, no computer, no friends until it’s done. Whether it takes five minutes or 30 minutes, this is the time to do it.

What makes this work so well for some ADHD kids? It is structured, at a set time each day. It becomes part of a routine. You are there to assist in cleaning up, because your kids need the direction. It isn’t a punishment; rather, it is a teaching example of how to motivate yourself when you know you have to get something done but you don’t feel like doing it.

As a parent with an ADHD kid, you could spend every waking moment trailing after your child, trying to get him/her to do what is needed. It’s not fun for you or your child. But when you take the time to anticipate the challenge, and involve your child in the problem-solving process, you’ll create a family dynamic that works better for everywhere—and get your house picked up as an added bonus!

