



Talking with kids about  
**TIDYING UP**





## TIDYING UP

You have enjoyed playing with your 1-year old son Marc. Together you have built big houses and castles with toy blocks. Then you pushed toy cars around these buildings, causing many of them to collapse. Marc has also taken various books from the shelf. Now the building blocks, books, toy cars and many more things are spread all over the floor and the furniture of the room. When it is time to clean up, you want your toddler to tidy up the room together with you. But Marc shows no interest; he is tired, angry and hungry and starts to throw toys around.

*Do you know such situations? When do they happen? How do you react?*

We would like to give you some suggestions for dealing with these situations. But first, here are some questions you may wish to consider/discuss concerning your initial reaction in such a situation.

## Analysis



*How would I interfere in such situations?*

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*How would Marc react?*

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*How would I deal with Marc's reaction?*

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***Would this situation lead to a conflict? If so, how would I solve it? Would there be a solution?***

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***How would the situation with Marc end up?***

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## Hints



Here you will find some suggestions for a possible solution of the situation described above. If you have the opportunity, please discuss it with your friends or your spouse. Exchange your experiences within an open discussion.

Are there things you would like to change? We hope to encourage you to try out ideas and actions that you believe could help resolve an issue with a tired child who is unwilling to tidy up.

If children learn to assume responsibility in their own possible way, you support them in becoming responsible members of society, taking part in Living Democracy. For more information please visit our homepage: [http://www.living-democracy.com/suggestions/?key\\_concept=responsibility](http://www.living-democracy.com/suggestions/?key_concept=responsibility)

- Look at how you talk to your child: if you often use orders, commands and snippy rebukes, this may impair the acquisition of language. Moreover, it is painful for the child and may keep him from learning anything. Try to avoid negative commands like: "Put your stuff away!" "Tidy up the room!"  
If you wish to read more about communication which is not conducive to democratic life and would like to review your own communication style in terms of destructive messages, please go on reading on [page 5](#).
- Try to always provide children with multiple options and ask about their opinions. You can do so with questions like: "What are we going to do with all these toys when we're done with playing?"
- Children love to receive positive comments. You can express this with compliments and positive reactions when a child offers constructive actions or answers: „Yes, you are right, we tidy up the toys, bravo!“ or “yes, I know, you are tired, let's do it quickly together, and then we will have dinner” or “yes, I can see that you are angry, do you want to do it tomorrow?”
- Act as a role model: Show how to put all the books on the shelf, building blocks in one box and toy cars in another. You must also keep order in your own documents, books, kitchen equipment or tools. Your child will notice and learn “I can find my things more easily and it is more fun to use them, if I keep order!”
- Invite your children to tell their own thoughts and listen to them. This way you stimulate the expansion of their vocabulary and the neural network in their brain.

### ***Destructive messages<sup>1</sup>:***

Messages and statements which provoke negative feelings and reactions in your children are called destructive messages. You do not respect and tolerate the feelings and thoughts of your children while interacting in this manner. Respect and tolerance are the basis for democratic action and such messages fail to convey that to your children. Your children may respond with short answers, defending themselves, feeling misunderstood and degraded. These kinds of messages lead to conflicts and sometimes stop the communication process altogether.

Destructive messages hinder children. They cannot develop their full potential when they only hear negative, degrading messages. This also prevents them from developing strong personalities, which form the basis of democratic societies.

To improve your communication skills and adopt a more democratic style, you need to first evaluate your current communication habits. You want to go for it? Start your training on the next page!

### **Training<sup>1</sup>:**

In the following, different examples of destructive messages are shown. Observe your communicative behavior daily for a week. Each time you use one of the following expressions when talking with your child draw a line just behind this sentence.

#### **Commanding, ordering**

- You have to...
- Come on, get ready...
- Say hello...
- Do behave...

#### **Scolding, admonishing, threatening**

- You always do...
- You never do...
- If you don't..., then...
- When do you finally...
- How often do I have to tell you that...

#### **Moralizing**

- We would have been so proud of you, but now we are disappointed, because you didn't...
- Mommy is really sad because you are so nasty.
- There are thousands of hungry children who would like to eat this.
- Once a liar, always a liar...

#### **Giving advice and comparing**

- If I were you, I would...
- The parents of other kids would...
- Your sister always tidies up her room.
- Everybody agrees to this. But you...

**„Talking with kids about tidying up” is based on the following references:**

<sup>1</sup> Heueck-Mauss, Doris. 2016. *So rede ich richtig mit meinem Kind: Wie Worte wirken: Konflikte fair lösen: Stressfreier erziehen*. Hannover: Humboldt, 74ff.

Nolan, Virginia. 2016. «Die Macht der Sprache.» *Das Schweizer Elternmagazin Fritz und Fränzi*, Oktober, 58-64.