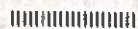


feature

# THE CLEAN TEAM

With the right game plan and super star teammates, spring cleaning becomes a game you can win.



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**F**ORGET ABOUT broken resolutions: 2011 is the year you finally clean your drapes, wash your windows, steam clean your carpets and organize your linen closet. Think divide and conquer - and to conquer you'll need an army, just a small one, just exactly the same size as your family. You might have been unsuccessful when April rolled around before, but most likely, that's because you were doing the work alone. You forgot about those little - or maybe not so little anymore - people living in your house. You all share one roof, and you can all share one annual, down-and-dirty clean-up.

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Of course, you must be realistic. Cynthia Townley Ewer, author of *Houseworks: Cut the clutter, speed your cleaning and calm the chaos* and creator of [www.organizedhomes.com](http://www.organizedhomes.com), notes that most spring cleaning jobs aren't within the reach of children below high school age. Near-adult strength is necessary for deep cleaning bathrooms, and near-adult caution is needed for climbing a ladder to a second-story window.

But a lack of muscle or maturity doesn't earn a child a free pass this spring. It is essential, for the child and the household, that all kids clean.

"Getting children involved with cleaning is good for the child and the family's mission," says Jeff Bredenberg, author of *How to Cheat At Cleaning: Time-slashing techniques to cut corners and restore your sanity*. "You're trying to bring up your child to be a competent adult. When a child knows what cleaning tools are, he'll be more competent later in life."

If you haven't gotten your children involved in cleaning in the past, this is the perfect time. Start when the sun starts to shine and everyone's mood is better than it could ever be on a cold, dark day in the middle of winter. (And, with a nod to Bredenberg's advice, once you start including the kids in your cleaning routine, don't stop.)

Your first step in enlisting your family's help?

A look in the mirror.

No, not to check for water splashes and toothpaste...

Mary Findley, owner of Mary Moppins, creator of [www.goclean.com](http://www.goclean.com), and co-author with Linda Formichelli of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Cleaning*, advises checking your thoughts about cleaning.

"Watch what you say around your children. If you find yourself saying negative things about cleaning house or doing laundry, guess what attitude your child will have," Findley says. "Wash your attitude with a load of laundry and get rid of the stinkin' thinkin'."

The cleaned-up message you should deliver:

"We have a wonderful home, and it is a pleasure to clean it. I'm going to start cleaning so we have a comfortable and healthy place to live, and I'm asking you to join in."

"Ignore all bleating and moaning," adds Ewer, the *Houseworks* author. "In spite of their complaints, they won't let you down."

Once everyone's on board the We're Gonna Clean-Whoo-Hoo! Choo-Choo Train, use these tips from Ewer, Bredenberg, Findley and Donna Smallin, author of *Cleaning Plain and Simple: A ready reference guide with hundreds of sparkling solutions to your everyday cleaning challenges*, to stay on the Tidy Track:

**THINK TEAMWORK:** Cleaning the bathroom on his own will feel like a jail sentence to a child, but with a parent, even a 5-year-old can scrub with a smile. While Dad wields the bowl cleaner and the tile brush, his helper cleans the sink, polishes the fixtures, empties the trash and hauls towels and rugs to the laundry room.

**TEST YOUR TEAM POWER:** You and one child head upstairs, and your spouse and another child stay downstairs. Who cleans the first room the fastest - or the best?

**CALL IN BACKUP:** While one family member is vacuuming, a child as young as 3 can follow along behind, cleaning baseboards with socks on her hands. If you have two or more little ones, make it a contest to see whose sock puppet gets dirtiest.

**MAKE A GAME OUT OF IT:** Play beat the clock. Set the kitchen timer for 10 minutes and see what you and your young assistant accomplish. Can you get the toilet and the sink counter top scrubbed?

**PLAY LIVELY MUSIC:** Crank up the stereo or let your children wear an iPod. The music helps them move and be energized.

**PLAY WITH WATER AND SUDS:** Let them splash in a little water and write with soap suds on the shower wall. Younger kids can write their A-B-C's and older ones can write their names.



**GET SILLY:** Put on Halloween costumes and take periodical breaks from cleaning to scare each other. Wear the costumes outside when cleaning up the leaves you never got to last fall and make your neighbors smile. Or if they seem like the type that can take a joke, sneak up on them, speak in a scary voice and scare them.

**DELEGATE:** Teens can handle “big jobs.” Once adolescence hits, working with a parent loses its appeal. Solution? Delegate big—but safe—jobs to teen children. Whether they clean and organize the garage, shampoo the living room carpet, or restore order to a jumbled linen closet, they’ll take pride in their work.

Smallin cautions parents to keep all the sorting and scrubbing safe, whatever your children’s ages:

“Be particularly careful about cleaning products,” she says. “Look for nontoxic cleaning products such as those from Method and Seventh Generation. Another great solution is to eliminate the need for cleaning products altogether by switching to microfiber cloths. Just wet, squeeze practically dry, and then use to clean mirrors, windows, and other hard surfaces with no streaking or lint.”

You’ll also want to protect their little egos. Mary Findley, the [www.goclean.com](http://www.goclean.com) creator, says that kids of all ages will soon stop helping if they are criticized at every attempt.

“Praise them and give them tons of hugs and personal time with you and not a financial or material gain. Keep the allowance out of it,” she says. “Yes, a lot of people will object to this, but allowance should not be a part of chores. You can emphasize, however, that by helping with chores you have extra time to read to them or do a craft project. Then let your child draw out of a bowl what you will do together.”

You can also take the Cinderella approach: Everyone cleans all day, then dresses up and heads for a night on the town. A movie, dinner and dessert enjoyed outside of the house means your home stays clean - at least until tomorrow.

## A step-by-step checklist for spring cleaning

Unless you’re Super Woman, you shouldn’t tackle spring cleaning the house on your own (see article) or without a plan. A lot of the same tasks are repeated from room to room. Don’t think of it as boring. Think of it as a chance to master each task in a matter of a few days! This list, compliments of compliments of SC Johnson’s [rightathome.com](http://rightathome.com), will get you started. Check the site for tips on tools and cleaning supplies and printable forms, complete with an “assigned to” line for each task. And if you’re really ambitious and energetic, you can also head outside. Yep, they have a list for that, too.

### Bathroom

- Throw out expired cosmetics, beauty products and medications. Place in doubled-up trash bags (to prevent kids or pets from getting into medications.)
- Throw away mascara after three months, creams and liquids after a year and powders after two years.
- Organize toiletries, makeup and medicine for easy access.
- Vacuum and wipe walls and ceilings. (Before washing walls, determine water resistance of all paint and wall coverings. Latex and oil-based paints are generally safe to wash. If your walls have a rough texture, use old nylon stockings instead of a sponge that could tear.
- Clean window treatments.
- Completely clean the toilet, including the toilet tank, even its back if you can reach, and base.
- Scrub shower or tub.

### Bedrooms

- Launder or dry-clean winter bedding and store. (To minimize storage space, close the seal, leaving about a half inch. Then roll up the bag, pushing out extra air. Get as much air out as possible; then close the bag entirely.
- Wash window treatments.
- Clean inside of window.
- Wash walls.
- Shampoo or steam-clean carpets, area rugs and upholstery.
- Shine and protect wood furniture.
- Toss or give away unwanted items: books, toys, games, electronics, etc.

### Kitchen

- Clean refrigerator and freezer, inside and out.
- Clean inside of microwave. Put a microwave-safe bowl of water with some lemon juice in your microwave and heat the water to boiling for 2 to 3 minutes.
- Clean window treatments.
- Dust tops of cabinets and refrigerator, cookbooks and cookbook shelves. Take the opportunity to give away any cookbooks you’re no longer using.
- Clean and shine counters, drawers and shelves.
- Reorganize contents of pantries, cabinets, drawers and spice racks so everything is easy to find.
- Sweep, vacuum and mop floors. Save cleaning the floor for your last task in the room.
- Polish metal hardware on cabinets, doors and windows.

### Living room

- Store heavy, cold-weather fabrics and replace with lightweight ones.
- Clean window treatments.
- Wash inside of windows.
- Wash walls and ceilings
- Shampoo or steam-clean wall-to-wall carpets, area rugs and upholstery.
- Clean shelves.
- Clean out fireplace for the season; store unused logs.
- Clean and condition wood furniture.

### Utility room

- Clean window treatments.
- Remove lint from clothes dryer hose. Replace lint catcher on washer hose.
- Scrub sink.
- Maintain sink drains with a product like Drano.
- Wash walls.

### Home office

- Clean window treatments.
- Vacuum and wipe walls and ceilings.
- Clean out files. Shred tax forms you no longer have to keep. Review and update insurance policies, contracts and household inventories.
- Properly dispose of or give away any unwanted software, hardware or electronics.
- Take books and accessories off shelves. Dust all.