

“CLEAN UP, CLEAN UP, EVERYBODY CLEAN UP!”

Parents get tired of nagging their children to pick up after themselves. Often, picking up for them seems like the quickest and easiest solution. And yet, picking up for children deprives them of one of their most satisfying learning tasks.

What do children learn from picking up toys?

They learn about the **value** of objects. When objects are carefully handled and placed back in their correct spot, children appreciate their value more. Parents can model respect for belongings by handling them carefully and setting them back on a shelf rather than carelessly tossing them into a tub.

They learn the concept of **place**. An early childhood physics lesson, young children come to understand "a place for everything and everything in its place" by putting away their toys. This helps them begin to establish an order for their universe. Toddlers thrive on order and predictability (even when they are themselves disorderly and unpredictable) and love knowing that "the red blocks go next to the green blocks."



Photo by Howard G. Buffett

They learn about sorting and **classification**. As children put away toys, they practice their emerging concept of classification. Animals go in this container, cars go there, puzzles go on that shelf.... This sounds tedious and mundane to parents, but is actually a developmentally appropriate game for little ones.

They learn the sense of **accomplishment**. When young children accomplish a task within their ability, they experience tremendous pride. They learn that putting forth effort is worthwhile because of the sense of accomplishment that follows.

They experience cognitive growth, social-emotional growth, and growth in their **self-esteem** as they experience what it is to be competent. Self-esteem cannot be taught. It is rightfully earned by children as they experience success and are supported in it by the adults who love them!