

Are Toddlers Running Your Home?

Toddlers are great, but they can be a handful! Their mobility, curiosity, need for stimulus, and dependence on us can fill our days with both fun and frustration. Listed below are helpful tips that I have used over the years to help gain some much needed quiet time and organization in my house when it felt like my toddlers were running the house.

1. Room time

This is a designated time of the day that your child plays in their room (or a playpen for infants) without you. Room time helps your child learn to play independently without having to be entertained by you. It also allows you to have some uninterrupted time to do things that you want or need to do. For room time to work, you need to start off slowly to help both you and your child adjust.

To start, I would suggest putting up a gate so your child knows their boundaries. If you feel your child needs to be able to see you, start by placing them in a room close to where you will be. Next, set a timer to mark the duration of room time; I suggest starting with 15 minutes. Over time, gradually extend the duration until you reach 30 to 60 minutes. The final duration depends on you and the needs of your child.

To encourage your child in room time, consider allowing them to play with “special” toys during these times. You may want to consider purchasing toys (or better yet: swapping toys with your friends) that are kept separate from their normal play toys. The “special” toys are only brought out for their room time, which should make the time special for them. You may even find that your child begins begging you for “room time” because they enjoy their time so much!

2. Toy Rotation

An abundance of toys not only clutters your child’s room, it can also over-stimulate and overwhelm them. You know this is happening when your children are surrounded by toys, yet seem to be bored with them. You can help your child enjoy their toys and room more by establishing a “toy rotation”. With a toy rotation, only a portion of your children’s toys are available for them to play with at any given time. This trick will enable your children to entertain themselves for longer periods of time and limit the clutter in their rooms. To implement a toy rotation, start by:

- **Sorting through your children’s toys.** First, throw out any broken or damaged toys. Next place the remaining toys in baskets or plastic bins. I prefer to use clear plastic bins with lids on them. They are usually cheaper and the lids allow you to stack them. Try to use storage bins that are small enough for your child to carry. Consider labeling the bins, (or use pictures for younger children) to help your children keep track of what toys go where.
- **Place the sorted toy bins in your child’s closet or play area.** Put the toys that are designated for “room time” up high where only you can reach them. Any toys that need adult supervision (e.g. toys with small pieces) should go out of reach as well. Place a selection of toy bins for everyday use within your child’s reach. Place the remaining “out-of-play” toy bins out of reach.
- **Periodically rotate your child’s toys.** If your children seem to be getting bored with their toys, it may be time to rotate the toy bins. Swap the current everyday toys with the “out-of-

play” toys. Now they will feel like they have new toys to play with and will entertain themselves again. This rotation system can also be used for books or stuffed animals.

3. Routine Toy Pick-up

The suggestions listed above are enhanced by routinely scheduling a time for your children to pick-up their rooms. Once “room time” or even regular play time is over, your child should pick up all the toys they have played with. At first you may need to help “train” your child in how to pick up by working alongside of them. They need to know what toys go where and you may need to motivate them until they can prove they can do this on their own. If you wait till they are tired, cleaning up will be a battle. Catching them when they still have energy left to pick-up is the key to maintaining your organization.

Over the years, I have found these tips to be effective in re-establishing peace and order with our toddlers. You and your children can benefit by adding some organization to your time and their toys. I guarantee that all of you will enjoy the benefits. Plus, you will be teaching your children valuable lessons on organizing their time and stuff that will benefit them for life.

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