

Handling The Frustration Of That Teenager's Messy Room

from the American Counseling Association

Say the phrase "messy room" to the parents of any teenager, boy or girl, and you'll almost always get a nod of understanding and a roll of the eyes in frustration. It's one of the most common causes of teen-parent disagreements.

So, looking for a magic way to make a teen's messy room problem disappear?

Lots of luck! But there are ways to reduce "messy room" stress and frustration.

First, identify the source of your frustration. After all, your child lives in the mess, not you. As parents, our frustration comes from what the mess says about our authority over our offspring and our effectiveness as a parent. If our child ignores the mess and our requests to clean, are we bad parents?

For your teen, however, the issue isn't the mess, but privacy and autonomy. Although we want our children to develop independence, it's disappointing to see it expressed as a messy room. However, to your teen that room is his or her domain, and keeping it as desired is a way of being independent.

So, instead of feeling frustrated, accept that this is part of the developmental process. But try setting sensible family rules that make it easier to live with that messy bedroom.

Rule one is that while messy is okay, life threatening is not. Bug attractors, like old food wrappers and dirty dishes, aren't acceptable. You can close the door on untidy, but unhealthy is a real problem.

Also set simple, acceptable rules for family use areas. Cleaning up after oneself in the kitchen, or getting that backpack out of the hallway, are rules teens can understand as reasonable, even when they see a clean bedroom as unfair.

It also doesn't help to clean up for your teen. That just breeds anger and the lesson that once it's messy enough, you'll do the job for them.

But do offer help. Many teens literally don't know where to start once the mess gets too big. Suggest ways to break that big task into smaller ones. Offer storage and sorting tips.

There are lots of causes worth pushing hard for with your teen. A messy room is seldom one. Someday that room will get cleaned. A new friend or the frustration of wrinkled clothes or missing treasures might be the motivation.

Or not. Then that clean room will just have to wait until he or she moves out.

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