

# Clearing the Clutter Feeds the Brain

*By P. Donohue Shortridge*

How much stuff does your child have? Where is it all right now? There's an essential developmental incentive to clear the clutter out of your child's life. Providing external order for your child allows him to organize his thinking. He is categorizing, sorting, grading and matching all the impressions he takes in every day. (Cognitively grasping *same* and *different* as well as *one-to-one correspondence* assists in math and reading skills.) It's confusing, harder to make sense of everything when everywhere he looks 43 books are mixed in with 27 action figures, 637 Legos, 15 dolls and 20 puzzles. Do I exaggerate? Only to make the point. Less is more for your child's optimal development.

So here are some strategies you might consider:

- The toy box: No matter how cute, inexpensive, convenient or cherished, the large universal receptacle does not lend itself to everything having a place. Shelving is best. Categorize the toys by type; each deserves a box, then shelved.
- Four puzzles will be used more often than fifteen. Likewise dolls, toy cars, stuffed animals, Lego sets, board games and coloring books. You get the idea. Children can easily get overwhelmed with too many choices.
- Create a place in the garage for your child's outdoor equipment such as balls, scooters and anything else you'd rather not have your child using indoors.

Your child wants to, and for his optimal development, needs to become responsible for his own possessions. Make sure that he can put every toy away where it belongs. Don't make the tub for the blocks so heavy he can't move it into place himself. Is there a home for his trains? Bags, totes and backpacks all deserve wall hooks hung low enough for your child to hang up by himself.

Sibling fights can be minimized if each person in the family, no matter the age has personal property rights. If your elementary-aged child doesn't want to share some of his toys with your four year-old, I suggest that that is his right. However, you might work with your older child to go through some of his possessions and together determine which toys he might be willing to share. Further, many of his no-longer-used toys can be ceremoniously bequeathed to his younger sibling. His most prized possessions, however, should have a place in his room.

And finally, the most effective way to gain his cooperation is to model what you teach. Maybe it's time for some clutter-clearing of your own.

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*fostering the authentic life of children and their families in the American culture*