

Too Many Toys

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It seems the more kids we have, the more stuff we tend to accumulate. Endless holidays, generous grandparents, growing children, and busy parents add up to a lot more coming into the house than going out. Kids outgrow their clothing, books, toys, and even their furniture. It's easy for over-tired parents to fall behind at getting rid of things they aren't using anymore and feel overwhelmed.

We set old toys aside in the garage and don't realize months later that no one misses them. Some parents never learned how to let go of things they no longer need and the idea of getting rid of something sounds scary.

No matter how we accumulated the excess toys, clothing, and clutter, studies have found that a home full of too much stuff can have negative effects on children and parents, particularly mothers.

In a study published [in 2012] titled "Life at Home in the Twenty-First Century," researchers at U.C.L.A. observed 32 middle-class Los Angeles families and found that all of the mothers' stress hormones spiked during the time they spent dealing with their belongings. Seventy-five percent of the families involved in the study couldn't park their cars in their garages because they were too jammed with things.¹

As parents, maintaining our physical and mental health is vital. We want to set an example for our kids that it is important to take care of ourselves and one way we do that is by teaching them how much is enough.

What if we don't know what "Enough" is? In her book *How Much is Enough?*, Jean Illsley Clarke suggests we think of "Enough" as part of a continuum: "Too Little", "Enough", "Abundance", and "Too Much". Abundance means we have more than we need. It means being able to have the things we want in addition to what we need. It means we have enough to share.

When parents who want to provide abundance give so much that the children fail to learn what is enough, they develop a mindset of too little, of scarcity, in the midst of plenty. The stepping-stone from too little to abundance is missing...Consequently, abundance, unrecognized and unappreciated, not only fails to be satisfying but often becomes too little, a source of dissatisfaction, even a painful addition to the empty hole of scarcity...Abundance depends upon enough.¹¹

Our society is largely living in "Too Much" and "Abundance". With homes and garages full of stuff, it is certainly impacting our kids. One study found that:

children raised in chaotic homes—characterized by noise, overcrowding, and a lack of order—tend to score lower on tests of cognitive ability and self-regulatory capabilities, have poorer language abilities, and score higher on measures of problem behaviors and

learned helplessness than do children raised in less chaotic environments (G. W. Evans et al., 2005; Hanscombe, Haworth, Davis, Jaffee, & Plomin, 2011)ⁱⁱⁱ

We don't want to raise helpless children. We want to raise capable children. Children who persevere, are patient, and determined. We want to raise children who can experience joy and contentment. We can start to do that by reducing the chaos and clutter in our homes – by reducing the amount of toys we have in our homes.

Does that sound scary? "My kids will be so bored!" "I'll never get anything done." "My kids will complain all of the time." "They *need* these toys."

In a project called "Der Spielzeugfreie Kindergarten" (the nursery without toys), Rainer Strick and Elke Schubert (public health officers who worked with adults suffering from various forms of addiction) were concerned about the addictive habits that start early in childhood and wanted to show that children can play happily and creatively when they are not being "suffocated" by their toys.^{iv}

The toys were removed from the classroom and the children were free to play as they wished (so long as no one was in danger) with the classroom furniture and some blankets. During the study they found:

"The children didn't know what to do but we left them alone, even if they were bored, because sometimes things in life are boring and you have to learn to cope"...

"The first two weeks weren't easy - the children dragged the tables and chairs about and they ran and shouted. I went home with a headache every day"...

once the children settled down to the new regime, they invented games: "They loved acting and putting on a show, or pretending to be in a circus or on a train, but most importantly, all the time they were playing, they were learning to socialise [sic]."^v

Schubert described the findings of the experiment, "We find that children [on the project] concentrate better when they work, integrate better into groups and communicate better than the children who didn't take part."

We needn't be so afraid to give up toys. Now, we don't want to take away a child's beloved toy just to be a minimalist, but we can be intentional about the toys we do keep. Legos, blocks, trains, cars, dress-up clothes, art supplies, puzzles, and games promote socialization, imagination, and creativity. Toys that encourage their talents and passions are important as are toys that inspire outdoor play. Get rid of the random forgotten toys from drive-throughs, broken toys, toys that don't line up with your new goals, toys you wish they played with but they don't, and big toys that aren't worth the space they take up.

If you're unsure whether to keep something, Minimalist Coach Allie Cassazza has three questions you should ask yourself:

1. Is this toy adding to my child's life in a positive way?
2. Is this toy played with every day?
3. Is this toy valued and looked for if it goes missing?^{vi}

If a toy doesn't meet these criteria, keeping it in your home may ultimately be doing more harm than good for your child's development. If you have children four years old or older, consider including them in the decision making and teach them the habit of routine purging.

What about gifts? Ask yourself the same three questions before adding new toys to your home. Focus on giving experiences as those tend to be the things kids remember as they get older. It's OK to talk to grandparents about the benefits you've learned from purging toys and to give them ideas of toys or experiences they can give that fit more in line with your new purpose. You don't want them to waste their money on something that won't be played with. It's OK to recommend a gift limit. Don't panic when your child has a birthday and will be receiving new toys. Learn to purge ahead of time and intend to gift an experience from the family knowing toys will come from friends and relatives. But don't tell people to not bring gifts. Look at the gifts as an opportunity to teach your child about being grateful.

Reducing the number of toys in your home can seem radical. Society may say you're depriving your children or being selfish for wanting your children to have fewer toys. But remember that you are giving your children a greater gift in the long run. On his blog *Becoming Minimalist*, author Joshua Becker lists how fewer toys will benefit children in 12 ways:

1. Kids learn to be more creative.
2. Kids develop longer attention spans.
3. Kids establish better social skills.
4. Kids learn to take greater care of things.
5. Kids develop a greater love for reading, writing, and art.
6. Kids become more resourceful.
7. Kids argue with each other less.
8. Kids learn perseverance.
9. Kids become less selfish
10. Kids experience more of nature.
11. Kids learn to find satisfaction outside of the toy store.
12. Kids live in a cleaner, tidier home.^{vii}

Choose to create an atmosphere in your home focused on what truly matters by removing or limiting the distractions.^{viii}

If you are deep in clutter and want your life back, you'll find it may not be worth the time to sell everything. Sometimes we feel like we're wasting money by donating things or throwing them away when we think we can recoup some of the cost by selling the items. The truth is, you wasted the money when you bought something you didn't need. Don't beat yourself up over it, learn from it. Maybe you did use the item and now you don't need it anymore. Now that item is taking up your time and space and is no longer worth keeping. Concentrate on selling big-ticket items, like furniture, and donate the rest. You will be helping local children and families which is something we want to teach our kids to value too.

The following is a list of locations for consigning and donating locally, as well as resources for working through overindulgence and clutter.

Consignment and Donation Locations in Bellingham

Children's Consignment locations accepting used clothing, toys, books furniture, and other baby items:

Flip – 1512 Ellis Street, (360) 671-0954, www.flipbellingham.com

Little Bugs – 2400 Yew Street, (360) 756-0507, www.littlebugsconsignment.com

Currently you can earn credit, but they are not doing payouts.

You can also donate your items to one of the accounts listed at

www.littlebugsconsignment.com/?page=donate and help local children and families.

Wee Ones Reruns – 2450 James St, (360) 733-6794, www.weeonesreruns.net

There are many online companies that will send you an envelope to mail your items to be consigned.

www.google.com/search?q=consign+used+children%27s+items+online

There are also local groups on Facebook or sites like Craigslist (bellingham.craigslist.org), and Offer Up (offerup.com) where you can sell your items yourself. Or have a good old-fashioned garage sale.

Donation Locations:

ARC – 1750 Iowa Street (with other donation locations and pickups available), (360)-671-3344,

arcwhatcom.org/wp/contribute/donate-used-clothing/

Accepting clothing and small household items

Bellingham Public Library – 210 Central Avenue , 360-778-7250,

www.bellinghampubliclibrary.org/friends-of-the-library

Accepts children's' books in good condition.

Goodwill – 1115 E Sunset Drive, (360) 752-2080, www.seattlegoodwill.org/locations/5

Accepting clothing and household items.

Lydia Place – 1701 Gladstone Street, (360) 671-7663, www.lydiaplace.org/support/

Accepting newborn and infant clothing through Little Bugs (mention you want to donate your items to the Lydia Place account).

Needing diapers, baby wipes, child proofing materials

Skookum Kids – 1701 Gladstone Street, (360) 671-7663, www.lydiaplace.org/support/

Call to see what they currently need (clothes, toys, cribs).

They are always accepting car seats that haven't expired.

Value Village – 150 East Bellis Fair Parkway, (360) 733-2333,

stores.savers.com/wa/bellingham/valuevillage-thrift-store-1031.html

Accepting clothing and household items.

We Care of Whatcom County – 3550 Meridian St, Ste 2, (360) 647-5415,

[/www.facebook.com/We-Care-of-Whatcom-County-537980622986683/](http://www.facebook.com/We-Care-of-Whatcom-County-537980622986683/)

Accepting donations of most anything clean and in good condition.

Resources

Overindulgence

How Much Is Enough? by Jean Illsley Clark.

Now titled *How much is too Much?: Raising Likeable, Responsible, Respectful Children—from Toddlers to Teens—in an Age of Overindulgence*, Perseus Books Group, 2014.

Decluttering your Home and Minimalism with Kids

Allie Casazza (<http://alliecasazza.com/start-here>) features blog posts and courses on intentional and abundant motherhood, decluttering, and living a more simplified and purpose-filled life.

How to purge kids rooms: <http://alliecasazza.com/blog/minimalism-purging-kids-rooms>

Articles on minimalism: <http://alliecasazza.com/blog/?category=minimalism>

How minimalism impacts kids: <http://alliecasazza.com/blog/how-minimalism-impacts-kids>

3 Weeks to Minimalist Motherhood Free Web Class: <https://alliecasazza.lpages.co/3-weeks-to-minimalist-motherhood-autoclass/>

ⁱ Hill, Graham. "Opinion | Living With Less. A Lot Less." The New York Times, The New York Times, 9 Mar. 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/03/10/opinion/sunday/living-with-less-a-lot-less.html?pagewanted=2&r=0&hp.

ⁱⁱ "Chapter 8." *How Much Is Enough?: Everything You Need to Know to Steer Clear of Overindulgence and Raise Likeable, Responsible, and Respectful Children*, by Jean Illsley. Clarke et al., Da Capo Long Life, 2004.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jaffee, Sara R., et al. "Chaotic Homes and Children's Disruptive Behavior." *Psychological Science*, SAGE Publications, 23 June 2012, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3494454/.

^{iv} Jewell, Sarah. "The Nursery That Took All the Children's Toys Away." The Independent, Independent Digital News and Media, 11 Nov. 1999, www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/the-nursery-that-took-all-the-childrens-toys-away-1125048.html.

^v *Ibid.*

^{vi} Casazza, Allie. "3 Weeks to Minimalist Motherhood | Free Web Class." Vimeo, Nov. 2017, vimeo.com/240598931.

^{vii} Becker, Joshua. "Why Fewer Toys Will Benefit Your Kids." *Becoming Minimalist*, 14 Apr. 2010, www.becomingminimalist.com/why-fewer-toys-will-actually-benefit-your-kids/.

^{viii} Casazza, "3 Weeks to Minimalist Motherhood."

