

Section 3: Teen Clean Machines

Parents may not dare vocalize it, but more than a few of us anxiously await that daunting time when our young adult children leave home to be on their own! “Maybe they’ll finally learn what life is all about!” we silently say as we smirk. Will that first electric bill put them into shock, or will it be doing all their own laundry, filling their car with gas they bought, cleaning toilets they dirtied, buying their own clothes, preparing meals, or fixing the flat tire?

We know it’s entirely appropriate that these life experiences be handed off to them—it’s a *right of passage* routine—and it’s just a smidgen delightful. This moment in family history will also inaugurate parents’ empty-nest life of more time, more money, and reclaimed storage space! (When did they get all those belongings that fill every extra shelf, closet and drawer in our homes?) Common storage spaces seemed to attract their

clutter like lint in a dryer.

Right on the heels of this greatly anticipated blissful launch, an unexpected panic sets in!

While the prospect of their moving out will most certainly eliminate the perpetual disorder they have created in our own homes, will slovenliness transfer smack into their new apartments, quarters, dorms, and condos? Perish the thought!

Is there any time or intelligent ammo left for one last ditch, give-it-all-you-have, desperate, do-or-die effort to correct their weak spots in housekeeping responsibility?

A few parents pray that some unidentified *other person* out there will step up and fix their kid’s mess problem (the same kid they have had little to no effect on for 18+ years). Perhaps the new roommate, employer, professor, staff sergeant, co-worker, missionary

companion, friend, fiancé, spouse, or in-law—will have a more positive and productive effect on straightening out their personal habits than the parent ever had. And in some cases, this does happen—but reality says, “Good luck!”

When required or expected, only a fair percentage of our kids actually behave better and get neater once out on their own. Even so, during those last few years they are under our wings for their final chapter of nurturing—if we can have a good effect—we’ll feel less guilty dumping them on some rescuer. Because once they leave, they are 95% out of our circle of influence—though never out of our circle of concern.

Is it possible to train and teach our OLDER ADOLESCENTS to do household chores?

For as long as parents have been rearing teens, you’d think someone would have figured out just the right brilliant scientific strategy for how to eliminate the classic littered bedroom and dirty bathroom condition in our homes, especially with all the talk show behaviorist doctors chiming in. Why haven’t we broken the messy cycle? If

kids can put numbers in the right order for college calculus, why can’t they put their rooms in order? One daughter’s room got so messy, her mom told me she was never sure if she was in there or not! The mom’s only consolation, “One day my daughter will have her own children just like her.” Touché.

Humans and animals coddle and preserve their young to a fault, not wanting them to taste of grief or discomfort. Today’s kids are more looked after (and for a longer time) than ever before. We give them everything they need and most things they want. Sometimes we even try to insulate them from real world earning opportunities, fearing it will hinder their social potential.

So kids grow up, expecting more and more—sometimes beyond the parent’s ability to keep up. It’s offspring entitlement epidemic. In spite of our parenting missteps, however, in many respects teens today are the absolute sharpest generation yet. They are intellectual, savvy and healthy. But do they reciprocate our nurturing protection and attention by happily doing household tasks to help maintain the family unit?