

#155 - How to Clean the House When Everyone Is Inside It (Part 1)

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 155 - how to clean the house when everyone is inside it. A lot of us are still sheltering in place, and that brings a new set of challenges when it comes to cleaning. Because there are so many challenges, we're going to make this a two part miniseries. Today, I'm going to share 10 principles of lived-in cleaning. Then next week, we'll get into some specifics like laundry, bathrooms, dust, and crumbs on the floor. You guys. The dust and the crumbs. There are so many people creating so much dust and so many crumbs.

So that's the game plan. Two weeks of figuring out how to clean the house when everyone is inside it.

Before we get started, I wanted to remind you that there is a Lazy Genius Facebook group to join. It's full of incredibly smart, encouraging, normal people who crowdsource Lazy Genius solutions to all kinds of problems. There's a link in the show notes if you're interested. Now is a time when we need community and solid resources to help us get through this. I'm glad you see this podcast as one of those resources, and the Lazy Genius Facebook group is both a resource and a community. I hope you check it out.

Okay, let's talk about cleaning the house when everyone is inside it. These ten principles will get you there.

Principle #1: You will never be done, but you can be done today. I put a call out on Instagram last week asking you guys for your cleaning challenges right now, and this idea came up often. Because of all the people home all the time and the constant mess, it feels like cleaning is never done. And in a way, that's true. Nothing stays clean for long, even on the best days. Entropy is kind of a bummer. So while it's true that you will never be done, the gift of being a Lazy Genius is you can decide to be done today. You can even make that decision based on different things from day to day. You might wake up one day with a lot of energy and motivation, the kids are happily playing in the yard, and your done might look like cleaning an entire bathroom or mopping the kitchen floor. And other days, done is just having the dishes in the sink instead of all over the counter or toys picked up in one room, ideally the room you're currently sitting in. So principle #1, you will never be done, but you can be done today.

Principle #2: Raise a new standard. Part of me wants to imagine thousands and thousands of Lazy Geniuses raising an actual standard, like a flag, in our homes declaring a new way of cleaning, but I don't mean a flag. I do mean a standard or a new way to measure what clean means. One of the Lazy Genius principles of cleaning a home in regular non-pandemic times is that you decide what clean means. That's still true, you guys. You still get to decide what matters and doesn't matter to you. It's just that this way of life has changed our standards

without our permission. We're still trying to put the old standard of a clean house into this new way, and that's likely not going to work very well. So it's time to raise a new standard. My standard before all of this was that I liked for things to be tidy throughout the house. Clean was less important, and I had even hired a housecleaner to come and take that part off my plate every other week. There's an entire episode on it by the way, but true solidarity for all of y'all who miss your housecleaner. I do desperately. But anyway back to the old standard.

My old standard was tidy mostly everywhere but especially in our main living area which is a living room, dining room, and kitchen in one more open space. That has now shifted to tidy in the living room only and even then only at night when the kids are finally in bed. Our dishwasher broke last week because of course it did, so we're washing dishes for five people and three full meals and a couple of snacks and yeah it's super annoying. The dining table is now the school room and art table, so there are undone projects and school papers on the table that's usually cleaned off. I'm raising a new standard that I don't have to have the same level of clean in my kitchen and on the dining table right now. I do want it in the living room so that when Kaz and I finally sit down together at the end of the day and eat ice cream and chips and salsa and watch Brooklyn Nine Nine that we can do it without staring at a bunch of visual clutter. But that one room is all my standard is right now. And while it's definitely not ideal, making the choice makes a difference. So raise a new standard. Start paying attention to where you're cramming pre-pandemic expectations into a pandemic-shaped hole, and maybe rethink what matters right now.

Principle #3: Create a Common Cleaning Code. Okay, I want you to choose three things or less - three is a more doable number here than five or ten, so please stick with three - choose three things that are the baseline for what makes your house feel as clean as you can under these conditions. This is where you name what matters, share it with the people you live with, maybe even come up with the list yourself, but if you stick with the Common Cleaning Code and that's all you maintain every single day, you'll be more or less okay.

The Common Cleaning Code could be actual tasks, or one of the things could be that each person spends ten minutes wiping something down with cleaner. Right? Like, it could be a use of time rather than an actual task. Or maybe one of the three things is that the entire family does two family tidies a day. Ours last as long as a song or two. There's even a Big Block Singsong song called Tidy Up that's two minutes long and is super catchy. So your Common Cleaning Code is whatever you need it to be, but name the three things that make the biggest difference on a daily basis, write them down, post them somewhere, whatever it is, and act on them every single day. Make sure they're doable. This isn't in an ideal world. The Common Cleaning Code is meant for falling apart world. It needs to be so simple.

Here are some ideas really quick: all dirty clothes go in the hamper, dishes are either in the sink or clean at the end of the day, the floors in the kitchen and under the table get swept or vacuumed every day, living room is tidy, toys in this room or that room are in baskets by bedtime, rinse your toothpaste off the sink after you spit it out. All very basic things. So principle #3 is create a common cleaning code.

Principle #4: Use the Good Enough Rule. This goes with raising a new standard and even the common cleaning code, but we need to give ourselves permission to live a B/B+ life right now. This is not a straight A time of life. Good enough is good enough. So when you feel the itch to clean a room and actually have the motivation to go along with it, remember that good enough is good enough. Maybe you don't get all the scum out of every corner of the shower, but it's mostly wiped down and that's good enough. The floors are swept but not mopped. That's good enough. The baskets are full of unorganized toys but at least they're off the floor. Good enough. Use the Good Enough Rule. This is the time to embrace average performances. It's our life now. That's cool. Good enough is good enough.

Principle #5: Name your best twenty minutes. Twenty minutes is a very special length of time. It's really short, shorter than an episode of TV, but if you actually pay attention, you can get a lot done in twenty minutes. Let's say you sleep eight hours a night - HA! - which leaves sixteen hours of being awake and sort of doing stuff. You're helping with school and making dinner or reading and blowing bubbles outside and referring sibling fights and all of it. But if you take the percentage of twenty minutes from sixteen hours, you're talking about 2% of your day. And you can get a shocking amount done in 2% of your day if you name your best twenty minutes.

So think about the time of day where you're usually at your pandemic best. It will unlikely be the same twenty minutes as before the pandemic, so really think about life right now. It might also be a decision you have to make at the start of every day. When is my best twenty minutes today? For me, my best twenty minutes is when the kids have settled into eating lunch. They're occupied, they eat at 11:30am so I'm usually not desperate for food yet, and I can spend twenty minutes doing whatever needs doing. Maybe it's stuff that's in the Common Cleaning Code that hasn't happened yet, maybe it's wiping down a bathroom or resetting a room to get ready for the second half of the day. Sometimes it's several things. The point is you can get a lot done in twenty minutes, especially if you name your best twenty minutes. When are you at peak motivation most days, at least by these upside-down standards? None of us are full of energy at this point, but when are you more or less not compelled to fall facedown on your bed and hope no one finds you? That's not the best time to get stuff done. That's the best time to fall facedown on the bed. So principle #5 is name your best twenty minutes and then use it to get a jump on something. And if you're feeling the pressure of how to spend that twenty minutes, decide beforehand. If your twenty minutes is at 11 in the morning, think and notice as you go about the morning what needs your attention the most, what has the biggest bang for your twenty minute buck. Then when the time comes, use that 2% of your day in a helpful way.

Principle #6: stuff is the enemy of clean. This is a cleaning principle I use a lot, but it feels very appropriate right now. We're all really struggling to get things clean because there's more people using more stuff during more hours of the day than ever before. A couple of ways to approach this.

First, clean up one mess before starting another one. So clean up the breakfast dishes before doing school. Clean up the school books and papers before pulling out the painting supplies.

Clean up lunch before making dinner. Clean up pretend doctor's office before putting together a puzzle. It doesn't have to be really mechanized or soulless or oppressive. You know your house and your people better than I do. But just in general, one way to deal with all the stuff is to clean up one mess before making another one.

The second way to think about stuff being the enemy of clean is to reevaluate your stuff. Maybe you start decluttering a little and removing what doesn't serve you and your house anymore. Some of you mentioned decluttering but not having any place to put that stuff since everything is closed. I'd check your local thrift stores before assuming. Mine are closed to shoppers, but my local Goodwill is still taking donations. Just check before assuming. But maybe it's time to declutter a bit. I have an episode on decluttering that I'll put in the show notes too.

Another way to reevaluate your stuff is to do a pandemic purge. You're not going to get rid of everything because that's crazy, but maybe you need to minimize the amount of stuff in your house and keep the essentials for now. Put everything that isn't essential into a box. Label it by the room it usually goes in, so boys bedroom, living room, playroom, kitchen, whatever. Just throw stuff that isn't super beloved or necessary right now into that box, stick the box in a closet or garage, and once we're out of this and can go back to a more normal rhythm of not being at home all the time, you can see if that stuff can go back. But get rid of some stuff right now and see if that helps. No special sorting or organizing or deciding. Just get it out.

But stuff is the enemy of clean, and there's so much stuff. I get it.

Which leads me to a very helpful principle #7: become a house of zones. Zones will save your life. We are all living in a house of piles and clutter, but try and think about zones a little more to make things easier.

For example, your goal isn't to have every dish clean at any given moment. That's unrealistic and insane. Right now, the reality is cups in the living room, breakfast bowls on the table, a few random plates on counters, basically dirty dishes are everywhere. The default reaction to that is to lament how you can't keep the dishes clean and then throw in the towel because you'll never get on top of it. Instead have a dirty dishes zone. I talk about zones in the kitchen in an episode about cleaning the kitchen, but even if the dishes are dirty, having them all in one spot on the kitchen counter at least gets them visually out of the way everywhere else. In fact, there's this weird mental victory because the dishes are where they're supposed to be. Even though they're dirty, they're where they're supposed to be in the dirty dishes zone, and you'll get to them when you get to them.

Another example is a school stuff zone. So we do our school work in various parts of the house: the dining table, the boys do it in the many forts they've built that are covering my house, their beds, the front porch, all over. Now if they keep their work in all those places, I will lose my mind. That is too much stuff everywhere and there's no hope of keeping anything clean. It becomes overwhelming. So we have a school stuff zone. We have a more formal dining room that we keep tidy under normal circumstances and use for when we have people over since the

table is really big, but there's no having people over for dinner right now so the end of that big dining table which is out of the way of our main living area is where all school stuff goes. It's the school stuff zone. Is it hidden? Nope. Does it make me feel a little cringy when I pass it because it's technically not put away? A little. But that's the zone. That's where it goes. That's where it's supposed to be. So look for things in your life, the stuff in your life that feels like it's everywhere all the time, and see if you can create a zone for it. Become a house of zones. Then when the stuff is there, it's less annoying because that's where it's supposed to be.

Principle #8: Find a new motivation. According to that question I asked on Instagram about your biggest cleaning challenge, so many of you have no motivation to clean because your usual motivation is people coming over. Again, no people coming over. Also there are no deadlines. There are no visits from grandma to spruce up the guest room, there are no birthday parties to host or even weekends that look like they used to. Our usual forms of motivation have disappeared, so we need to find a new motivation. I think the principles up to this point will help in creating some space around this, but what is a motivation for you? Maybe it's sanity. Maybe it's raising that new standard and finding yourself more motivated now that the standard is different. Just sit with that for a minute. What's a new motivation? Maybe when it's time for your best twenty minutes or you have a random hour where the rest of the family goes on a bike ride, you listen to an audiobook or fun music while you get stuff done. I have a Spotify playlist called Quarantine Groove that I'll link to in the show notes, and it's upbeat but just a tad angsty because we're all at the very least a tad angsty these days and some of the songs have profanity in them. Obviously I'm not going to blast that list when the kids are home, but there's a fun motivation to being able to blast it when they're on a walk and I can get a little done while yelling Demi Lovato at top volume.

Another idea for motivation is to bring someone else into it. Put in your earbuds and call a friend and y'all both blitz clean but talk while you do it. We've got to get creative on how to get motivated to do anything these days. Everything is just so weird, so take a minute and find a new motivation, even for today. Because today's motivation might not make sense tomorrow let's be real.

Which leads us to principle #9: days look the same but you might not. Days look the same but you might not. There are so many things happening around us and within us, and I have been shocked at how different I feel about the same day from day to the next. It's just how it is. So remember that even as you try and loosely systemize some of this stuff, you're going to feel different more often than usual. Your family will too. It's like we're on the same boat, but the weather every day is crazy different and there's no real forecast for it either. Just be patient with yourself and your people in that. Days look the same but you might not. And that's okay.

And finally principle #10: be a team. If you live with people, you're on a team. Not everything is about any one person ever. Sometimes we have to do things together. Sometimes we have to make a choice that helps someone else in a big way. It's easy to feel like the captain of the team too, especially if you're usually the person who's home with kids if that's your life stage, but everybody has the capacity to be the captain sometimes. You don't always have to be the

captain, but you are all always on a team. That looks like everyone else letting one player sit out because she slash you is just really struggling and needs to go for a walk alone for an hour. It means family tidy time. It means everyone choosing a meal to eat for the week. It means putting the groceries away together. It means having quiet time in the afternoon even though one kid hates being alone but another really needs it sometimes. We're on a team. We're in this together. It's the most important principle really.

And that's it! Those are the 10 principles of lived-in cleaning. Next week, we'll talk through some specifics: laundry, dust, bathrooms, the crumbs on the floor and figure out some strategies to clean those specific things. But starting here with these principles will put you in the right mindset to do those jobs. Also try and come back to this episode sometimes if you need a reminder.

Okay, that's it for today! Thanks for listening! Until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week.