

Cleaning up Messes | Not Just for Kids

A powerful tool in parenting is learning to consistently clean up the messes that we make

We all make “messes” - We show up in ways that are not God’s best and compromise the functioning of our family. Unresolved, these messes lead to further anxiety, conflict and breakdowns in our families. Messes create messes.

Messes are an opportunity for growth - Growing as parents requires that we learn from our mistakes and humbly commit to new directions. In parenting, we are modeling for our kids wise ways to live and relate to others.

Messes can be cleaned up - As a wise momma once said, “Don’t cry over spilt milk,” we can clean up our messes. Consider this simple, yet powerful, 4-step process:

1. **Acknowledge** that you made a mess, taking responsibility for your actions and attitudes. “I didn’t show the way that I wanted to.”
2. **Get present** to the impact of your actions and attitudes on others. Ask those affected, “What was the impact when I ____? How did it feel when I ____? What did it make you think that I feel about you?”
3. **Apologize**, humbly and with heart. “I recognize how my actions and attitudes impacted you. I’m sorry.”
4. **Cast vision**. “In the future, I want to [describe the actions and attitudes in regards to how you desire to show up.]”

Repeat as necessary, seeking to make this process a habit in your life and family.

The real power in this process is step two, getting present to the impact of how your actions or attitudes affected your child. The more fully you are able to engage this step, the easier it will be to live into your intention and vision for your family the next time. Not coincidentally, this is the most uncomfortable part of the process and, for that reason, is often skimmed over or skipped altogether. If you resist this temptation and lean in to the challenge over a period of time, you will begin to experience genuine changes personally and in your family.



Personal Reflection (10 minutes)

(1) Think of and describe a recent mess.

(2) How did you show up? Why do you think you showed up that way? (What was going on inside of you?) If you could go back, what would you do differently? (What actions crossed the line or do you regret?)

(3) Take a moment and imagine going through the 4-step process for cleaning up a mess. As you consider engaging the process, notice what stirs in you. Hope? Resistance? Fear? Anxiety? Other?

Small Group (10 minutes)

In a group of 3, each person is invited to take 3 minutes to share the following:

- Briefly describe the mess and what you'd like to do differently next time. (#1 & #2)
- Share what's stirring in you. (#3)

(let everyone share their experience without interruption and please refrain from giving advice)

(4) What do you do next? How do you envision using this practice in your life? Are you ready to set a time to talk to your kid and to clean up your mess? If not, what could you do to prepare yourself (talking to another adult friend, etc.)?
