

Children of Hoarders on Cleaning When They Left The Nest & Routines

To: Childrenofhoarders.com

From: "anonymousCOH"

An exlover taught me how to clean. That was my strategy - to be honest that my parents never cleaned and so I didn't know what cleaning was, could you please explain that to me? It did cause problems with roommates but here and there people did take the time to explain what THEY meant by cleaning. For instance, doing dishes doesn't just mean doing a load of dishes and leave the rest dirty, it means the dishes are done. Cleaning the kitchen means doing the dishes AND wiping off the counters and the cabinets AND at least sweeping the floor if not mopping. My exlover taught me a lot - he was very patient with me. I still don't feel all that confident, I often buy every cleaning product for a particular job and then jump in.

To: Childrenofhoarders.com

From: "truckinwife"

I was confused on what paperwork to save and what was important for keeping when it came to taxes, bills and the like. So I kept everything for awhile, until I had a paper monster growing in the corner of my office and it was getting scattered all over the place by daily life and looking for things.

Since then I have done several web searches and found out the information I needed to handle paperwork, and what was important to keep and what was just more stuff in my life. I still deal with this on a monthly schedule, as if I didn't I would have envelopes and the like taking over my home office space. Lately I have found a great way to get rid of non-sensitive paperwork that comes through my home. I now use those papers to line the bottom of my bird's cages which I clean daily. It saves my budget, and also uses something that would just otherwise clutter my life.

To: *Childrenofhoarders.com*

From: "anonymousCOH"

One thing that threw me for a loop was when a roommate of mine washed a can opener. I had no idea you could do that! Now I know that you should, but I have no idea how.

No idea how to clean a bathroom. I was instructed how, but never shown, and I couldn't tell the difference between before and after cleaning. Since no method seemed effective, nothing sunk in.

How often do you clean appliances? (My mother's answer was "never")
How do you clean a toaster oven or a stovetop? (I had no idea there were special cleaning solutions for getting grease off)
Why bother vacuuming? I notice when a place needs vacuuming, but I just don't care.

I don't put things away either. The clothing I wear regularly is perpetually in one laundry basket or another; the clothing in drawers is stuff I don't wear regularly. And irregular-use things, like a heating pad or a box of band-aids, will just sit out forever, because I don't care.

To: *Childrenofhoarders.com*

From: "Julia"

I was taught to clean properly by both my non-hoarding parent (my father) and by his mother. So I left home knowing how, and how often, to sweep and mop a floor, how to wash laundry properly, how to wash dishes properly, change sheets, and so forth.

At our house, the problem was mountains of stuff, years of stuff ... stuff my mother did not allow to be moved or handled because she needed to "go through it," piles upon piles of newspapers and magazines, and dust and cobwebs and

minor vermin because we were not allowed to move the stuff. Actual garbage like food waste was thrown away, but "stuff" almost never made it into the garbage.

Part of the kitchen -- the sink, part of one counter, and the stove -- was clean and accessible, and that is where food was prepared. Most of the bathroom was clean and accessible, my part of my room was clean, and my father's bit of personal space was clean, because my father and I stayed at it whenever Mom wasn't looking.

Crazily, I had to beg to clean my half of my room as a child. Mom had boxes upon boxes of her deceased mother's belongings stacked in my room, occupying about half of the available space, and she was terrified that I would throw something "important" away -- like one of her mother's old magazines or an old piece of mail. So Mom would "supervise" while I cleaned my room. I was not allowed to throw away my old tests or homework from school -- she would dig them out of the trash because that was a "sentimental item" to her way of thinking. I would diligently clean my room but in reality, the clutter I removed -- old toys and coloring books, old homework, etc. -- those things just became part of her hoard, stashed in another room besides my own.

I can remember showing my mother the "right" way to clean certain things as early as eight or ten years of age: "Look, Mom, this is how Grandma does it..."

When I left home, my dorm room and later my apartment was as Spartan as a military barracks. Instead of having problems learning how to clean, I had problems knowing when to stop, and how to make my place look cozy and lived-in, like a normal person.

To: Childrenofhoarders.com

From: "Jane"

I left home to go to college about 400 miles away. I was clueless about housekeeping and basically didn't worry about it. I was fortunate to have clean roommates, so I tried to do what they did. The college that I went to had weekly room inspections, so I learned to clean it up for that even if it was a

mess the rest of the week. I think the inspections must have been on Friday, because I developed the habit of cleaning my home every Friday even after I graduated from college and married. I think my Friday cleanups must have been my unconscious attempt to prevent my home from getting into total disarray. However, it took me awhile to realize that faucets, stoves, refrigerators etc. needed washed occasionally. I remember when I visited my mother-in-law's house that I didn't know how to use a dishwasher or a home washing machine. When I was very young my mother used a ringer washer, so I knew how to do that. But, during my teens we had extremely low water pressure, so we didn't have any kind of washing machine. We took a nasty, smelly, yellowed load of dirty laundry to the town laundromat once in a while. So, laundry was one thing that I had no clue about how to do correctly.

To: Childrenofhoarders.com

From: DorinneCOH

These are things I wondered, starting my own household with my husband (and sometimes still struggle with, honestly):

Do "normal" people grow up just knowing what needs to be done to keep a house in order? Is it something someone can teach me?

How many ____ is too many? (clothes, collectibles, books, dishes, etc).

How can I organize my kids toys? How many toys should they have?

Is it ok to get rid of a gift someone gave me if i no longer use or need it?

How often do you change the sheets? Or change filter on the AC? Do curtains need to be washed, and if so how often? Do picture frames need to be dusted? Do people really clean the baseboards, and if so, how often? How often should floors be mopped or vacuumed? How often should you clean the toilet?

What's the best way to keep up with the laundry? Do washing machines need to be cleaned? Do dishwashers need to be cleaned?

What do you use to clean? What type of cleaner is best? Do you really need a

different cleaner for each part of the house (kitchen, bathroom, all-purpose)?
Do you use paper towels? Rags? Scrub brushes?

How do I keep from having piles of things right inside the front door (backpacks, lunch boxes, groceries, mail).

Do I have to clean/scrub/vacuum/mop the whole house every day too keep it a normal amount of clean?

To: *Childrenofhoarders.com*

From: "jaded junk"

I muddle through housecleaning the best I can. I learned through trial and error how to mop, clean my bathroom, clean my kitchen, and do basic house maintenance things like maintain my yard and change my furnace filter. I stopped letting people help me clean because I got tired of being told I was doing it wrong (not in a nice way- more like "what's wrong with you") and feeling ashamed. I do not vacuum or wash linens as often as I probably should because of growing up in a house where those things rarely happened. One thing that frustrates me a lot is that I have to wait until things *look* dirty before I can clean them instead of just keeping up on them. Otherwise I feel as if I'm wasting cleaning products (even though I know that's not really true). I worry constantly when people visit that they will spot something I haven't cleaned up to some "normal people standard" that I don't know about, or that my house smells bad in some way and I'm oblivious to it. My childhood home smelled terrible (mold, garbage, rotten food, etc.) but I rarely noticed it from being in it- I got used to it.

But the worst is the disorganization. I have no system for mail or important papers, and no idea how to organize a pantry or linen closet. I use my closets for storage of clothes I don't wear or don't fit me, and I have to keep the clothes I do wear in sight, or I forget that I have them. The only "organization" I learned as a kid was to stuff random things in a bag/box/container and set it aside. Out of sight, out of mind.

To: *Childrenofhoarders.com*

From: *anonymous COH*

I struggle every single day ever since I left the hoard at the age of 17 and that was 26 years ago. When I first moved out I moved in with two girls who were sisters and about ten years older than myself. It was really nice because they were organized and kept the house clean but my room remained disorganized.

I could throw things away, I just couldn't grasp the concept of organization. To this day I cannot organize on my own and here is an example of that and it overflows into every aspect of my life and I do not know how to gain control over it....perfect example....

I always lived with other people and they always cleaned and organized for me, my ex boyfriends and ex roomies. Then I finally bought a house. At first my good friend helped me and when I stood staring into my new cabinets in the kitchen and couldn't understand which one should hold glasses, dishes and food items. my friend organized all that for me and then I was able to keep it that way. but I couldn't figure it out on my own.

In my bathroom I have a medicine cabinet and another cabinet next to the sink and then I have a hall closet for towels etc...so here is my dilemma with that. If I have medicine, I think it should naturally go in the cabinet next to the sink, since the medicine cabinet holds my tooth paste, tooth brush and items I use every morning and I also wouldn't want to risk accidentally dropping a pill down the drain, so I don't want them directly over the sink. so the medicine cabinet is in order for me, but then it comes to the cabinet next to the sink.

If i put medicine in there like sudafed, cough meds, aspirin etc, then shouldn't ointments and anything associated with first aid go in there too? Then I have the problem of deciding what should all go into that category, because as I try to put all these like items together, I suddenly run out of room in that cabinet. Then I need to put the overflow into the hall closet with the towels but now I get overwhelmed and I don't know what items should stay in the bathroom and what items should go in the hall closet.

Then if I try to decide based on what I use more of then the category gets blurred to me and I get overwhelmed and will spend an hour looking over everything and trying to make decisions. At some point I get too much anxiety and I give up. In my mind, I think that "normal" people know how to organize all their "stuff" or they were taught that by their parents and it just comes naturally to them. to me, it does not.

I also have issues with drawers. We never had clothes in drawers growing up because you couldn't get past the boxes to get to the dressers, so we lived out of hampers. to this day, when my boyfriend puts clothes in my drawers after doing laundry I will simply look around my room and look in the clean clothes basket for clothes and then he tels me to look in the closet or look in a drawer...and there they are, but it doesn't dawn on me to go there first. And I have an anxiety about not being able to see my clothes in plain view. When they are in the drawers, I can't see them and it messes with me.

To: Childrenofhoarders.com

From: Colleen Toft Sheehy

I think I overcompensated for being a CoH by getting my BachSci in Home Economics Education! My Grandmom (father's Mother) also taught me a LOT, cooking and baking as well as basic housekeeping. Dear Mama' used to complain bitterly that we spent Saturdays at Grandmom's house, doing yard work and helping her out as needed, but I think it kept me sane. Grandmom was the most generous, giving person I've ever known, and I try to be just like her! I was afraid to even admit to my mother that I loved my Grandmom when I was a kid.

To: Childrenofhoarders.com

From: "shadownight17"

I knew how to clean my bathroom when I moved out. I had a vague idea of how to clean the kitchen and living room. Or at least I thought I did. How often should you mop? Too much stuff is too much? How many clothes are too many? How long do you keep an outfit? How do you clean a washing machine? How do you clean an oven? What is a good cleaning agent? How do you use bleach properly?

To: Childrenofhoarders.com

Fr: 'stickgamechamp'

I have definitely have problems knowing how and how often to clean things. I think I've been able to get a basic understanding of surface cleaning, but anything requiring deep cleaning I struggle with.

I usually end up doing laundry when my dirty clothes hamper is full/overflowing. I rarely will do a load before it reaches this stage. All of the laundry I do I wash in cold water. Growing up when we did my Mom's laundry, she was very specific on her bras being washed in cold water and would flip out if we didn't have the setting on cold. So I learned to just wash everything in cold water to avoid something bad happening to clothes. I do sort my clothes by lights and darks, so I don't have stains from dyes. I'm kinda afraid to use hot water for laundry. Because I wasn't taught properly. *shrug* cold water seems to work fine.

As far as bath towels, I never know how often to change them. I'm trying to just use one towel and washcloth no longer than a week, but I've sometimes used 1 bath towel for multiple weeks before getting a new clean towel.

(I also used to be absolutely terrible at bathing--in high school I pretty much just washed my hair once a week and that was my entire bathing routine. It's a wonder I had friends!) With much difficult conversations with husband and coaxing and encouragement, I've been able to develop a routine where I shower every day and wash my hair every other day. It embarrasses me terribly that it took so much work for me to get to this point.

I usually don't clean things in my home until they actually look dirty.

Hubby and I will clean bathtubs, sinks, mirrors, stovetop, counters, sweep floors, vacuum floors, and wet swiffer floors. We don't dust very often.

I recently took our broom and knocked down spider webs inside and outside the house.

The apartment we lived in before our new house had white walls, white baseboards, and wood floors. I would wipe the baseboards from time to time when they looked dusty, then would sweep the floors, then would spot clean the wood floors with wood floor cleaner/polish. (I think our landlord was floored when she saw how clean we made it when we moved out. The floors were a mess when we moved in, and by the time we moved out they looked brand new. So that was a nice boost to my COH ego, lol.) I learned how to use wood polish from my grandmother and mother-in-law.

Every once in a blue moon I will take disinfectant wipes and wipe down doorknobs, light switches, and faucets. I learned to do this from a home health aide type job. I was given a list of cleaning tasks that needed to be done once a month and so it was nice to see what things needed to be done. I should try to see if I can get a copy of that list, actually....it was very useful.

I have no idea how to clean cloth furniture, like a couch. We just vacuum our couch when we vacuum the floors and then febreze it.

I learned a way to clean spills out of rugs from my grandmother. We were at her house one time and I had a glass of egg nog sitting next to me on the carpet. My mom accidentally knocked it over and my grandma grabbed a glass of water and paper towels. She poured a little water on it, mopped it up, poured a little more water, mopped it up, and kept repeating until it went away. So when hubby spilled red juice on the white carpets in the apartment mentioned above, I did the same. No trace of red left when I was done, and I didn't use any kind of cleaner. Just water. We didn't tell the landlord about that one, but why bother? It wasn't visible. :)

Anything else? I have no idea how to get hard water stains out of showers. I see

commercials for cleaning products, but we haven't gotten around to trying any of them.

I have no problems cleaning toilets. I had a summer job running a small trinket store and concession at a scout camp and that included cleaning the bathrooms. The camp director showed me herself how to do it. She was a tough, no b.s. intimidating woman, but always seemed to like me. Her attitude about it and her efficient way of cleaning stuck with me and I never had a problem. She might have been surprised at some of my lack of abilities, but she was the kind of person to just show me without question instead of leaving me guessing.

To: ChildrenofHoarders.com
Fr: Donna

When I moved away from home and into a college dorm, I was far too fixated on my room and the space I could now claim as my own, rather than my studies. I'd sit in classes and obsess over different ways I could organize my room, and how to set up systems so that I would never run into danger of "hoarding it up." I re-arranged, re-organized, everything needed to be put in a container of some sort where it belonged, anything that could be, was labeled. But the extreme organization came in spurts.

I would repeatedly create chaos by moving furniture around, dumping out drawers of clothes and papers, making a huge mess in the middle of the room...so I could "fix it" and create order from the mess. Something I longed to do in the home I grew up in.

I'd keep my dorm room extremely neat...but when some area got messy due to having no routines for upkeep, it seemed to give me permission to let the whole rest of my space get out of control. When it became a "crisis" is when I would clean things up and organize.

I had a "crisis-cleaning" mind-set- I realize now that that's what we would do when I was growing up, when we knew somebody would need to come in the house. No daily upkeep, but rather; Let it all accumulate until it's so bad and so

shameful, that you need to shove it- cram it- hide it in a hurry, any way you can, so nobody will know.

...Don't put food in the trash can and let dirty dishes sit until there are bugs... don't throw your dirty clothes on the floor and then dig something out to wear again from the pile..., separate the laundry... measure the amount of soap... fold it as soon as the dryer cycle is done rather than let it sit for days... wash your sheets even if they don't have stuff spilled on them... sweep the floor even if you can't see the dirt and it's not crunching under your feet... use the toilet brush...there were so many things others seemed to just know that I didn't.

There were a lot of ways I learned what "normal" people do for routines. In my early adulthood, I lived with a boyfriend and his mother was an extremely organized and efficient homemaker. She would comment to her son how she couldn't believe I didn't do x-y-z in terms of cleaning or home-keeping and he would tell me; and not always in the nicest way. It's not because I was lazy that I didn't do these things, I just didn't **_know!_** It was very embarrassing, but that embarrassment drilled many of those lessons in. The lessons we learn the hardest, are the ones we learn the best I guess.

Later in my adulthood, when I have lived on my own and there was nobody to "keep me in check," I have often fallen into the same behaviors I had in my dorm room. Hyper-neat, or let everything go, and stay up until the wee hours crisis cleaning if necessary.

Now I purge my possessions regularly and strive to be a minimalist. FlyLady.net has helped me to learn some routines and **_stick with them_**. But, I often wonder if I lived on my own again ... am I one life trauma...one bout of deep depression away from becoming a hoarder? I guess I'll have to wait and find out.