**Spring cleaning with young children**

Spring is the time of year for cleaning. Some of us have images from our childhoods of moving everything out of each room, cleaning it and then only putting some things back; not everything is kept. Spring cleaning is deep cleaning and is done after a long winter and before the summer when most families are busy with outside activities.

A typical two-year-old will say, “Me do, me do.” Harness that early independence and enthusiasm and put it to work! Whether you have two-year-olds or thirteen-year-olds, they are a member of your family “team.” Get them involved in cleaning.

In the publication *Young Children*, Nancy Jones writes that she involves young children in the big jobs in her early childhood program. She defines a big job as "a useful, helpful task that requires several people to work together." Such tasks typically involve physical activity, problem solving and communication for planning and directing.

During her 30 years as an early childhood professional, Jones says she has observed that children benefit from completing big jobs. After finishing group tasks, she says children work more diligently at challenging activities and are friendlier with peers. Most importantly, children experience personal satisfaction by taking charge of themselves and the world around them.

Here are some ideas for indoor and outdoor big jobs for the home and early childhood setting. With the right tools (small buckets, sponges, rags, child-size shovels and rakes) and adult supervision, children can work together to complete big jobs.

**At home**
- Try on summer clothes and donate items that are too small.
- Sort through toys and books and decide which ones can be donated.
- Vacuum and sweep closets.
- Dust toy shelves.
- Wash tricycles and other toys for outdoor play.
- Sort items for recycling, such as newspapers, cardboard, plastic milk jugs and metal cans.
- Sweep patios and porches.
- Pick up sticks and leaves from the yard.
- Fill a birdbath with clean water.
- Spread new mulch on flowerbeds.
- Turn over dirt in the garden area.
- Spread grass seed and hay over bare areas in the yard, then water newly seeded areas.

Can involving your children in cleaning slow you down? Yes. However, if you consider the three primary benefits to your children, it is worth it in the long run. Involving them helps them learn skills. In addition, they have the opportunity to feel a part of the family team and they gain pride in accomplishing something. Besides, some day they will have their own houses and they need to know how to clean and organize.
For more information related to parenting, cleaning or organizing, Email Lisa Wallace at wallacel@missouri.edu, call her at 660-885-5556 or visit her in the basement of the courthouse in Clinton.