

DEMOLITION DERBY!

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Do you have a child who just loves to pull things to pieces? What about the child who smashes their toys or demolishes their room when you put them in time out? Do you have a child who creates a monster mess by clearing their shelves and pulling everything out of their draws? Aaahhhh! Sound familiar?

It is clear that the answer lies in *why* they do it. Firstly, toddlers have to be taught how to handle their toys. They don't know about being careful or gentle until you teach them. It is very hard for them to understand that it is OK to bash pegs into holes with a plastic hammer but not to whack big sister over the head with it. It is confusing to them that you want them to throw a bouncy ball at you but that they can't throw their tip-truck at the cat. Fortunately, young children's toys are light, harmless, and without many moving parts, but they also love to poke their fingers and other objects into holes and pull on anything within reach. You have watch over them with an eagle eye to ensure heavy or harmful objects are kept out of their way.

Young children are naturally inquisitive and want to know how things work. They want to know how things turn, make noises and fly. For this reason there is a whole range of play activities that allow them to create and experiment. Our five-year-old grandson has been having a fabulous time making planes out of Lego. Yesterday he made a stool by screwing Meccano pieces together. At this age you can help them understand how and why they need to look after their toys so they can continue to play with them. In some cases you can dismantle a toy or object just to show a child how it works.

Why is it that some children want to break their toys or demolish their rooms? Obviously there are some children who have not been taught how to take care of their stuff. Others get so many toys that they do not value what they have. 'If I break this dolly, Daddy will just buy me another one'. A child may be jealous of another sibling getting more attention or stuff than them so they try to destroy that sibling's favorite toy. A child may be craving parental attention by destroying something. A negative response is better than no response at all. A child who is put in their room for a nap when they are not tired may spend the time 'rearranging' their room – everything on shelves and draws being deposited into the middle of the room. A child who feels they are not being treated fairly knows they cannot kick, punch or scream at their parent so instead may go crazy in their room to 'teach Mom or Dad a lesson'.

It is vital that we ask ourselves why our children are exhibiting negative behaviors. It is rarely their fault and often ours. We need to train them how to look after their stuff. We need to monitor their moods and not push them beyond their endurance. The Bible tells us not to 'incite our children to anger', so it is

important to teach them how to manage anger and frustration. When we create healthy communication between parents and children they feel safe to talk about what is bothering them even if we don't want to hear e.g. "I don't like it that you give Billy lots of toys and take him fishing and not me." We don't always have to be confrontational when we see our small children getting frustrated. It is far better to divert their attention or help them with whatever it is they can't do themselves.

It is most important to clear expectations regarding care of toys, stuff and rooms. If they demolish their room, then they either clean it up immediately or you help them to do so, depending on their age. If they deliberately break a toy, then it should not be replaced. If they do not respect their toys, then most should be put away so they only have a few at a time. Perhaps if they have to save up and buy their own toy they will realize its value and be more careful with it next time. If you think your child has uncontrollable anger issues, then get professional help. There are many adults in prison because their frustration, anger and disrespect of others' stuff were not managed when they were children.

Our kids love to know how things work. Give them many opportunities to experience this without them having to destroy something to find out for themselves.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.