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PARENTS

Coming Clean!

Our strategies tackle your toughest jobs, from sippy cups to stinky shoes.

by **LESLIE CORONA**

PREVENT THE ICK!

Before using a new bath toy, plug up any holes with hot glue, suggests Courtenay Hartford, author of *The Cleaning Ninja*.



CLEVER WAYS TO CLEAN ...

Bath Toys

Ignore the Pinterest hacks to place tub toys in the dishwasher! Your toys might not be made to withstand a dishwasher's heat, which means that the plastic may break down over time. Instead, make a solution of $\frac{3}{4}$ cup bleach to 1 gallon water in a bucket, and throw the toys in. Suction fluid up into hollow toys like rubber ducks and shake vigorously, then squeeze the liquid out. Rinse thoroughly with hot water and air-dry. Try **Clorox Regular-Bleach** (\$2.50 for 64 oz.; grocery stores nationwide).



CLEVER WAYS TO CLEAN ...

Stuffed Animals

Favorite loveys get grimy, but washing your little one's bedtime companion can be nerve-racking. You don't want to mess with his sleep!

First, check the care label. If the stuffy is machine washable, go for it. But if not, proceed with caution. Some stuffed animals may not dry properly after going in the washer, which can lead to mold and mildew, warns Melissa Maker, author of *Clean My Space*. Her fix? Place the lovey in a pillowcase (don't let your kid watch!) with a cup of baking soda, and toss to distribute the baking soda. This will lift ground-in dirt. Take out the stuffy and shake off the excess baking soda, or use a handheld vacuum to remove it. Finally, spot-clean stains with a damp cloth.



● High Chairs

Experts we spoke with agree that this one's a toughie, because many high-chair straps aren't removable. However, you can usually get the seat cushion out and wash that. Scrub the straps and the places where they attach to the chair with an old toothbrush and a 50-50 vinegar-water mix, says Hartford.

PREVENT THE ICK!

When shopping for a high chair, look for one with simple straps and a tray insert that fully covers the tray and can be removed for cleaning. Plus, the plainer the cushion (with fewer folds and crevices), the better.

● Car Seats

Cereal, raisins, sand, dried spilled milk: There's a whole lot of mess in the back of your car. Luckily, most car-seat padding can be thrown into the washing machine, but it's time-consuming to put back on. If you're not dealing with a sick-kid mess or a diaper fail, try these tactics:

+ Whip out baby wipes from your diaper bag to remove moist, loose material like spit-up right away.



+ Suction up debris with a handheld vacuum like **Black+Decker's Dustbuster** (\$60; amazon.com).

+ Dislodge crumbs and dirt from narrow crevices with a nifty compressed-air duster.

+ Use an old toothbrush to scrub off any stuck-on gunk.

+ Scrape away anything that's extra-encrusted with a dull knife such as a butter knife.

PREVENT THE ICK!

Car-seat shopping? Consider **Chicco's NextFit iX Zip Convertible Car Seat** (\$350; chiccousa.com) for its zip-off padding that's truly easy to put back on after cleaning.





Playspot Geo Kid Foam Tiles are easy to clean (\$79; skipshop.com).

Foam Play-Mat Tiles

These baby faves can't help but be dirt magnets, since they spend their life on the ground! Using a solution of mild all-purpose cleaner and warm water, scrub tiles with a cloth. Let dry. Don't need a full clean? Spot-treat marks with **Mr. Clean Magic Erasers** (\$2 for two-count; Walmart stores) or disposable wipes.

● Dolls

Solid-body dolls can be washed right in the bathtub while your kid is bathing—playtime and cleaning all in one! For hollow-body dolls that could get waterlogged, wipe the doll with a cotton ball soaked in soap and water, and use a cotton swab for the crevices, says Nancy Bock, senior vice president of education at the American Cleaning Institute.

● Potty Chairs

After a pee, simply rinse with a mild all-purpose cleaner or soap and warm water. For number two, spray with **Clorox Clean-Up Cleaner + Bleach** (\$4 for 32 oz.; grocery stores nationwide), let sit for 30 seconds, and then thoroughly rinse with water and dry.

● Diaper Pails

Spot-cleaning with an all-purpose household cleaner will suffice, but to really beat odor-causing bacteria, make a solution of 2 cups water to 40 drops lavender essential oil, which has antibacterial properties, says Maker. Spritz your pail all over with the solution. Aah, smells good!

PREVENT THE ICK!

Steel diaper pails like the **Ubbi** (at right, \$80; buybuybaby.com) or the **Bubula** (\$90; buybuybaby.com) really do prevent smells from sinking in.



CLEVER WAYS TO CLEAN ...

Crib Mattresses

Wipe down a waterproof crib mattress with a baby wipe. Seriously, that's it! If your mattress is fabric covered, mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup hydrogen peroxide, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water, and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. dish soap; dip a sponge into the solution and wipe the mattress. The hydrogen peroxide is key, Maker adds, because it breaks down bacteria. Let the mattress fully dry before you put on a fresh fitted sheet.



● Sippy Cups

If your kid's cup develops a yucky odor, the silicone spout and valve are likely to blame. Put these pieces in a container, bury them with baking soda, and leave them overnight, says Maker. Then soak all the pieces in equal parts white vinegar and water (enough to cover) for up to 12 hours. Finally, use a bottle brush to scrub the cup and top, and rinse.

PREVENT THE ICK!

Moisture is a sippy cup's enemy, so fully disassemble it before washing (including all silicone and rubber parts), and be sure each piece is totally dry before putting the cup back together, advises Hartford.



CLEVER WAYS TO CLEAN ...

Smelly Big-Kid Stuff

Just because your kid's out of diapers doesn't mean cleaning gets easier.

1 Lunch Sacks & Backpacks

These get funky—fast. Throw them into the wash on a gentle cycle, then into the dryer on a low-heat setting, advises Hartford. Don't worry about the metallic pieces—they're no different than, say, the zippers on jeans that go into the dryer. Maintain the lunch sack on the daily by wiping it down with a damp cloth or a wipe such as **Clorox's Disinfecting Wipes** (\$3 for 35; grocery stores nationwide), says Merry Maids' on-staff cleaning expert Debra Johnson. If you use a disinfecting wipe, rinse the surfaces afterward, per package directions.

2 Stinky Shoes

Their moist environment is a breeding ground for odor-causing bacteria. At home, instill a no-shoes policy (bonus: cleaner floors!), and insert shoe deodorizers like **Mini Moso Natural Air Purifying Bags** (\$10 for two; mosonatural.com) into his shoes when he walks in the door. Or make your own destinking powder: Mix ½ cup cornstarch, ¼ cup baking soda, ¼ cup baking powder, and a few drops of essential oil in a zip-top bag. Each night, sprinkle a pinch into his shoes. Give them a shake over the trash can before your child puts them on the next day.

3 Sports Gear

The material in shin guards, hockey gear, and football pads is prime real estate for bacteria. During the season, keep odor at bay with a disinfecting spray like **Clear Gear** (\$9; cleargearspray.com). Some removable pads may be washing machine-friendly, but if not, fill a large bucket or a bathtub with cool water and an enzyme-based laundry detergent. Soak, agitate, and rinse. Then give the pads plenty of time to fully air-dry.

4 Uniforms

Attack sweaty machine washables with a detergent like **Hex Performance** (\$10; hexperformance.com) that's specifically formulated to get the stench out of synthetic athletic fabrics. If you're dealing with a dry-clean-only band uniform or a theater costume that needs to be worn night after night, **Febreze Fabric Extra Strength** (\$5; target.com) will be your new best friend, because it's specifically formulated to eliminate, not hide, odors on hard-to-wash fabrics.

—Kate Bayless