

# *Cleaning House*

A MOM'S 12-MONTH EXPERIMENT  
to Rid Her Home of  
YOUTH ENTITLEMENT

*Kay Wills Wyma*

Foreword by Michael Gurian



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WATERBROOK  
P R E S S

CLEANING HOUSE

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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*This book is dedicated to my husband and kids, who not only put up with and participate in all my harebrained ideas, endure my singing responses to their questions, and tolerate my often-embarrassing yet well-intended actions in front of their friends but also genuinely support their mom and wife with the closest thing to unconditional love this side of heaven.*

*I am forever grateful.*

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# Operation Clutter Control

## *Starting Simple: Beds and Clutter*

Cleaning your house while your kids are still growing is like shoveling the walk before it stops snowing.

—PHYLLIS DILLER

I've never been accused of being a perfectionist or a neat freak. In fact, as mentioned earlier, I'm somewhat organizationally challenged. I tend toward a guiding philosophy of: What's the point in putting things away when you're just going to have to get them all out again?

Hmm... I think I've heard my kids say the same thing.

In my career-girl days, more than one boss eyed my desk, suspicious that anything productive could transpire among the piles of paper. But by that point, my organizational-impairment issues were already deeply woven into the somewhat knotted fabric of my character, as my college roommate could attest.

Poor thing had no idea what she'd signed on for when she agreed to live with me. In an effort to make new friends, we had both gone blind potluck in our freshman dorm at Baylor University. We met over the phone. Then, as girls do, we giddily agreed on matching bedspreads and various sundries, and hugged the day we moved in.

It didn't take long for Susan to realize that even though I might be an agreeable roommate—fun, spontaneous, laid-back—I was a bit of a slob. Cluttery, one might say. Sure, like the good girl my momma (and our housekeeper, Bea) taught me to be, I would make my bed (most days), but I would leave every article of clothing plus some other stuff on it or thrown to the floor beside it. To transform my makeshift wardrobe into a bed each night, I'd just shove the piles aside and snuggle up under my cozy hill of clothes, ready to wear whatever might be on top to class the next day.

By contrast, Susan was organized, a borderline Type A. But once she collided with my whatever-goes attitude, she soon crossed over to the dark side of creative clutter.

When friends in my dorm brought their visiting parents to our room, I initially thought that the photos they snapped were scrapbook additions to memorialize their daughters' campus life experience, that their oohs and aahs expressed admiration for our adorable furnishings.

I was wrong.

Our room had become a destination location for freshman girls, a showcase of clutter should their folks be inclined to chide them for a disorderly room. Mind you, Susan and I weren't dirty...just carefree and casual about putting things away. But on the inside, like most reasonable people, we both craved order. Every so often we'd get a taste of it.

If my mom happened to be in town for a visit, she would stop by and declutter our room while I was at class. Neatly hanging pants and dresses in my closet. Folding, ironing, putting shirts and shorts in drawers. Pairing and placing shoes on the space-saving over-the-closet-door racks. She worked wonders like a fairy godmother waving her magic wand. (Might this be the origin of my enabling issues?!) For about a day, Susan and I would revel in the clothes-free floor and beds, making each other well-intentioned promises to maintain order.

In the years since, I've addressed many (though certainly not all) of my organizational challenges. Still, I can empathize with my own brood of clutter-happy kids. I can appreciate those unmade beds. I get the "Why

put it away? I'm just going to wear it tomorrow" attitude. I care about cleanliness but, like them, not so much about clutter.

But my empathy doesn't change the reality that, with seven bodies in our house, keeping the clutter under control is an absolute must. So, for years I've been scurrying behind my family, picking up and putting away as if clutter patrol is my job. I'm quick to gather the shorts abandoned on the floor right where they were taken off, to put away the towel that left a damp spot on the carpet where it was thrown the night before, to make the beds in hope that tidy rooms will provide productive work environments when their occupants sit down to study, even to flush toilets when that simple action proved too much for my children to remember.

In truth, however, my real responsibility as their mother is to teach, not to handle tasks for them. I need to help these kids tackle their tendency toward untidiness before it becomes a permanent fixture in their lives.

Determined that necessary life lessons will be learned, I decide to stifle my *laissez-faire* flair and strategize the best way to instigate order, introduce work, and inspire commitment—a real, life-altering commitment. In short, a *habit*.

## Habit [hab-it]

*noun*

1. an acquired pattern of behavior that has become almost involuntary as a result of frequent repetition: *the habit of making one's bed as soon as you get up every day.*
2. customary practice or use: *picking up after oneself is a habit in some homes.*
3. a particular practice, custom, or usage: *the habit of doing chores, whether or not one thinks they are boring or someone else's responsibility.<sup>1</sup>*

## HOME HABITS

Why do bad habits so easily sneak their way into our lives, while good habits take so much more work? Studies suggest it takes twenty-one days to make a permanent mental shift and form a positive habit.<sup>2</sup> But experience suggests it takes up to a few months in our house. Maybe longer. Suffice it to say, our empowerment makeover may take a while to sink in.

That said, the idea of introducing only one primary goal or task each month makes it all seem doable. I've decided to start with the bedrooms, throwing in bathroom clutter for good measure. (We'll save Tilex for another month.) The goal for this month is to form a tidiness habit. Basically, I just want stuff off the floor and beds made—*every day*.

It's crazy that even though I know we need to change (and making beds doesn't seem like that big a deal), when faced with actually running the gauntlet I've designed for us, I'm dreading this more than the kids are. Apparently, I like change just about as much as they do. Doubts start to creep in. Will this ridiculous Experiment even work? Is it a waste of time and energy? What if I lose heart halfway through? What kind of an example will that set for my kids? Yet, fueled by frustration, I'm determined to move ahead.

I think I've established that I'm not a parenting expert. Feeling a tad at a loss for how to start, I conclude it might be helpful to know the steps involved in forming a good habit. Here's what I learned from wikiHow.<sup>3</sup> (Okay, so it's not some Oprah-endorsed, best-selling, self-help guru, but this isn't rocket science.)

### *Step 1: Know What You Want*

Got it: I want my overindulged kids to make their beds and lose the clutter.

### *Step 2: Make a List of the Benefits of the New Habit*

- It will teach them responsibility.
- It will make them better citizens.
- It will build their self-esteem.
- I won't have to do it myself or look at it anymore!

That last one is the most compelling benefit, from my perspective. Those unmade beds not only testify to a “serve me” attitude but also are an incredibly annoying, ever-present reminder of how lame I've been at enforcing chores.

### *Step 3: Commit to the Habit*

I'm on it! Hoping determination will win out over my tendencies to procrastinate and to forget the follow-through.

### *Step 4: Set Your Own Goals, and Reward Yourself*

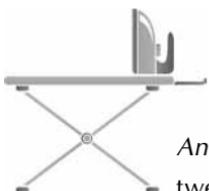
Since the plan is to nurture a habit in the kids, I'll be setting the goals on their behalf, as well as finding a way to reward them.

My friend Lauren shared her strategy, which we'll be implementing. A mother of three, she decided to incentivize her teenage girls by putting a jar filled with thirty one-dollar bills in their rooms at the start of a month. Each day she checks to see if the beds are made and the stuff is put away. If rooms don't pass inspection, she takes a dollar out of the jar. At the end of the month, the girls keep whatever cashola is left in the jar.

With five kids that's a lot of money each month. But we don't provide an allowance. We've tried, but I kept forgetting and often found myself “borrowing” from their meager stash. It became a tiresome, never-ending discussion of them being “owed,” so I stopped. And since I'm often buying them things like Frappuccinos, I Heart Yogurt, Slurpees, and other goodies, this approach would shift the responsibility for such nonessentials to their wallets. Perhaps those less inclined to clean their rooms will be inspired by their plunder-partaking siblings.

**Step 5: Start Slowly**

Sounds reasonable. Better to start with just their rooms rather than hitting them with all the changes at once, military-school style. The laundry will have to stay on *my* to-do list—for now.

**The Ironing Board**

*Ann Bentley* is a mother of four boys ages nine to twenty-seven, grandmother of one, and host mother to a sixteen-year-old Vietnamese exchange student. Married thirty-one years to her college sweetheart, Chuck. A hopelessly addicted reader/learner/seeker of wisdom.

*Sue Bohlin* loves to both teach women and laugh, and if those two can be combined, all the better. She is happily married to Dr. Ray Bohlin, president of Probe Ministries, and together, they have two grown sons.

*Jody Capehart* is happily married to Paul, who is in his fortieth year of playing french horn in the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. They have three grown children and five grandchildren. Jody's passion is for her family.

*Julie Fairchild* is a mother to four mostly grown kiddos and a husband who's a child at heart. In her spare time, she and a friend run Lovell-Fairchild Communications, a publicity and grass-roots marketing agency that specializes in projects with organic faith.

*Kathleen Fischer*, mother of three, is a registered nurse with a master's degree who is passionate about teens. She speaks and writes on the challenging subject of parents successfully navigating teen waters.

### *Step 6: Go for Consistency Rather Than Performance*

I'm not sure what that's going to look like, but it's probably worth thinking about. I guess for us, it's about consistency over perfection. I'm not asking much. Their beds *should* be made every day. The clutter, though,

*Jane Jarrell* is a mother, wife, accomplished speaker, and author on hospitality and parenting. She uses wit, charm, personal stories to teach women practical ideas and creative solutions for life.

*Dottie Jones* is first a wife, then a mother, and as time permits, an author and speaker. She is the cofounder of both Life Ministries and Ministering to Moms. Dottie happily shares her wisdom and insight through teaching and mentoring.

*Ruth Meek*, mother of four and mentor to many, is a highly sought-after speaker (and soon-to-be author) on simplifying Christmas, the benefits of silence, and intimacy with husbands.

*Lucina Thompson* is a friend, wife, mother of two, and a true lover of God's Word. Lucina teaches a women's Bible study at Watermark Community Church. She is passionate about her kids and her extended community in poverty-stricken regions of Africa.

*Sue Wills* is a mother of four (including me), grandmother of fifteen, and hostess extraordinaire. She has never met a stranger and is a constant target for wisdom-seeking women.

*Peggy Zadina*, mother of two grown girls and grandmother of one precious girl, has been married to the same man for nearly forty years. This interior designer loves golf, bridge, and encouraging others in their family relationships.

will be a challenge, especially considering the fact that the kids share rooms. I want bedroom and bathroom floors clear but will accept reasonable items on desks and counters. No piling allowed. One person's clutter will most definitely be another's issue. *Eek*...I can already hear the blaming.

Consistency just isn't my strong suit. But I want to stay at this even when day twenty-one rolls around and we're still struggling with the new habits.

### *Step 7: Consult a Friend*

Whatever you do, don't go it alone, for sure! I'll have my Ironing Board of reliable experts as well as a cohort of sympathetic friends to rely on.

### *Step 8: Even After the Goal Is Hit, Keep It Up*

Absolutely. We're trying to build skills for life, so my hope is that the habit will stick and we'll see a permanent change. I'm not looking for perfection, though. My goal here is to get the kids to start taking care of their spaces and quit thinking they exist to be served.

## THE PITCH

With *habit* defined and strategized, it was time to initiate the assault on apathy. Dottie Jones, one of the wise and well-traveled mothers from whom I've sought direction, gave me some great advice: always begin any major overhaul with a family meeting. This advice was easy to embrace because I had seen it modeled by my father; he always held family meetings to discuss matters affecting us. So we did.

And unlike other family meetings—the dreaded, old-fashioned lectures from Dad on behavior modification—this meeting actually involved the kids' participation in defining issues and possible solutions. Personally, I would much rather be included in a decision impacting me than be expected to simply embrace an edict bellowed in my direction.

In the meeting, we discussed the plan. Every kid gets a jar with money. If a particular kid's room is a mess or the bed is unmade (or both) when I check each morning, one dollar disappears from the jar. Seems reasonable and straightforward, right? Here are a few of their responses:

- “What are you and Clara going to do if we are doing all the work?” *Appreciate the concern, but Clara (my friend who helps out twice a week) and I will be quite all right.*
- “Do the bigger kids get more than thirty dollars in their jar?” *Hmm...no. It seems to me a bed is a bed no matter your size.*
- “What if I just forget and then remember right when I get in the car for school?” *Sorry. You snooze, you lose.*

I'm sensing a “mean mom” comment headed my way from at least one of the kids. But honestly, we all know (including them) that it's lame to pretend any of this is taxing. Even so, I've really got to be on the ball here and make sure I follow through. Otherwise, the chaos of clutter will continue to reign.

## ONE SMALL STEP TOWARD PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

After our family meeting, we went to the Container Store, where each child chose a clear box or jar. Back at home, the kids personalized them, then I filled them with fifteen dollar bills and fifteen dollar coins (just for variety...and because those gold dollar coins are so cool), and set them on their dressers. I also explained to them that no dollars could be used until the month was up, though we may later change to an “end of the week” time frame. Deferred gratification is a good thing.

I got a jar for myself too. Hey, I could use thirty bucks at the end of the month for a little self-indulgence. Yes, they get to check my bed, and I'm throwing in daily exercise for good measure. Gotta love accountability!

On the news the other night, an interviewee exclaimed, “Where does government end and personal responsibility begin?”

I muttered to Jon, “It has to start at home first.”

The more I think about it, the more I’m convinced the failure to take personal responsibility is an endemic issue for our culture. As our kids age, the youth entitlement problem leads to a needy society, incapable of critical thinking; incapable of making decisions; incapable of problem solving, creating, deducing, finding cures. Being overserved leads to atrophy of personal initiative. No wonder our kids opt out rather than dive into responsibility-laden opportunities.

Let’s face it, only a precious few are born with the internal drive to achieve. The overwhelming majority produce that drive only when their existence or well-being depends on it—or when they come to believe that one of the innate purposes of being human is to accomplish something of worth. We really aren’t helping our kids when we race in to help. Sure, by doing things for them, we accomplish the task of the moment and make their lives easy. But in doing so, we deny them the character-building op-

### **Expert Advice: Personal Responsibility**

From Chuck Bentley, chief executive officer of Crown Financial Ministries and father of four, comes this nugget of wisdom:

Lesson 101 for children is personal responsibility; without this they are helpless to accomplish their God given purpose. The cornerstone of personal responsibility is the character trait of Work. To teach your children to work, to produce, to accept responsibility for results, to bear the burden of completing a task that meets expectations is the foundation for their maturity into adults.<sup>4</sup>

portunities that come only through encountering resistance. In the long run, our well-intentioned assistance weakens both their bodies and their spirits.

What was it that Neil Armstrong said as he stepped out of a spacecraft (which, have we forgotten, was created by human ingenuity when challenged by the call to put man on the moon)?

“That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.”

Well, in our house, a month of making beds and clutter removal is one small step that I hope will morph into great leaps and bounds for these kids as they grow into productive citizens.

I know. It’s a bit dramatic, but a recovering enabler needs one big idea to cling to, something that will help me focus on the hoped-for greater good of our Experiment and somehow remember to follow through.

## MIXED RESULTS

Over a week into Task 1 of the Experiment, and the rooms are looking good! Consistency has entered the building. Floors can be seen. Beds are being made, though our definition of “made” may differ wildly from yours. None are smooth and tight enough to bounce a quarter, but covers up is just fine with me. I’m even hearing comments such as, “You were right, Mom. I think my friends would feel a lot better with our room like this.”

*Whoa.*

I didn’t think that kid was even listening when I pontificated months ago about how rude it is to invite your friends into a virtual pigsty. At that time eyes were rolled and moans were groaned that everyone’s room looks like this. So I had opted for the course of least resistance, determining that my child could reap the rewards of a messy room reputation—all the while knowing deep down that, like my mother, I’d eventually clean it up myself.

Now, after basking in the beauty of the “you were right” comment, I admitted to myself that what I’d expected to be a nightmare—making the kids do menial labor and checking their work—hasn’t been so bad after all. Best of all, they are getting a taste of how good it feels to be orderly. Such firsthand rewards are even more encouraging than a dollar in the dresser jar.

Still, keeping rooms clean can be a bit of a challenge around here since everyone has a roommate. Poor Jack shares our bedroom; he still sleeps in our walk-in closet! So not only are these kids decluttering their own messes, but they are also navigating the tricky waters of dealing with their siblings’ stuff. I’ve heard the “It was her underwear, not mine!” whine more than once.

Mean Mom response: “Work it out.”

I’m well aware that this could lead to World War III. Or they just might figure out how to

1. serve others—and we all know that serving your family is the toughest order around;
2. creatively find a solution to use one another’s strengths (one of my girls actually loves organizing and cleaning, while the other enjoys making the place look cute); or
3. just do the work, even if it isn’t your stuff, because—guess what?—life isn’t fair.

As I suspected at the outset, this transition has been easier for the girls than for the boys. The girls get the idea that cleaning up the clutter means putting *all* the stuff away. My boys have been edging around the letter of the law with no interest in the spirit of its intent.

- Pajama pants on the bathroom counter: “What’s the big deal? They weren’t on the floor.”
- Toothbrush and toothpaste left out by the sink: “Why does it need to go in a drawer? I’m just going to have to get it out tonight.”

- Wet towel on the floor: “That’s where I put it.” (Is he for real? Does he actually think the floor constitutes “put away”!)
- Pajama boxers draped over the tub: “Those aren’t dirty. I’m wearing them again tonight.” (Oh wait, that’s not one of the kids, that’s Jon—the husband. An entirely different issue.)

I suspect some people might find it slightly pathetic that I’m so excited about my kids making their beds. I get that. We should have had this down at age four. Oh yeah, we did do it when they were four. When did we stop? Did I just forget? Was it after three kids that I gave in? Four? I don’t remember. But somewhere along the way, tidiness flew out the window...and some kid slammed it shut. But I can’t look back, only forward. The past is the past, but the future always holds hope. I understand that the teen years seem the absolute worst time to introduce increased expectations. But if we’re successful in this phase, imagine what they can do when the funk has lifted! And despite the occasional push-back, we really are making progress.

My least favorite part of our Experiment so far is my new role as the Enforcer. In our quest for tidiness and clutter control, I dutifully make my rounds checking the kids’ rooms. Upon poking my head into the boys’ room, I discover a mess of sheets, blankets, and pillows. We’ve got a violation here.

“Well, today you lost a dollar,” I tell the teenager when I get downstairs.

“What are you talking about?”

“Your bed wasn’t made.”

“Yes, it was.”

“No, it wasn’t.” (I feel myself getting sucked into his vortex of juvenile stubbornness.)

“It was made.”

“I don’t know what your definition of ‘made’ might be, but your bed was not, by anyone’s standard.”

“Still”—now he takes a subtle talk-to-the-hand tone—“don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Annoyed, I shoot back, “What are *you* talking about? The bed was *not* made, and your clothes are on the floor.”

“No, they weren’t.”

I fight the urge to scream. As anyone with a teen knows, we could go upstairs and look at the unmade bed together, and he would still claim that it was made.

While he adamantly defends his room’s tidiness, the toddler decides he wants his milk in a blue cup instead of the perfectly fine and already filled green one. He proceeds to insist on the blue cup, increasing in volume and determination to the point of writhing on the ground, wailing the words, “*Bluuueeee cuuuupppp!*”

Having traveled the toddler road before, I respond calmly, “Your milk is just fine in that cup right there.”

“*Noooo*. I waaaaannt bluuueeee-hoo-hoo.” Sob, sob, sob.

Great. Stereo action. A toddler in one ear, a teen in the other.

Ignoring them both, I roll my eyes and settle in, waiting for the “Cal-gon, take me away” moment to end. Once they both realize that I’m not budging, their stubbornness subsides. The toddler reaches for the green cup, and the teen admits the truth—not that he’s wrong, just that the bed wasn’t made.

Jon’s reaction when I laughed about my experience later that day: “Well, I hope you took the dollar.”

I did. But when I first saw the bed unmade, I had to fight the urge to make it. *He just forgot. He has such a good heart. I’m sure he meant to make it; he has a lot on his mind.* Reality was all too apparent: the covers and pillows clearly lay right where he had wriggled out of them that morning. Still, inexplicably, I searched for a way to allow his bed to pass inspection, a reason to give him grace, just this once. As I turned from the bed to

check the bathroom, I saw his clothes piled on the floor in a corner by the window.

I forced myself to take the dollar.



## We're All in This Together

I had a wake-up call about a year ago at Cotillion (a social etiquette and dancing program) when the leaders asked the group, “Who made their beds this morning?” When only 5 percent of the hands went up, I realized we are not serving our kids by letting them get by with the least they can do. My eleven- and thirteen-year-olds needed me to set high standards and expectations.

At the moment, we are on a point system for things each child desires. A long-term point system for my son who craves the iPod touch that *everybody else* has and for my daughter, clothes (she loves clothes as I love chocolate). I tally the daily points, which they get for the usual stuff—bed made, room clean, clothing put away, and so on—but also for excelling in school and activities, getting along with their sibling, and being positive. The tough part is they get double the points taken away for not doing the above things. This combination of positive and negative feedback has worked better for us than anything else we had tried. We have also done this system for short-term rewards (iTunes gift cards, and so on).

So here’s a cheer for all of us moms trying to do the right thing. For we all know it’s easier to do it ourselves than make the kids do it. But who said the easiest path is the best one?

—Kristy

## THE DANGERS OF APPLAUSE WITHOUT ACCOUNTABILITY

It really isn't about making the beds. It's about equipping and empowering our kids.

My husband, Jon, and I had very different childhoods. He grew up in the impoverished mountains of Bolivia, a child of missionaries. I grew up on the affluent side of a west Texas town, child of a banker. Jon had very little free time on his hands. He spent any of those golden free moments outdoors, usually kicking a soccer ball. I had lots of free time, though without all the electronic distractions of today. I watched TV, listened to music as I lounged by the pool, and played hours and hours of tennis. His first car: a Toyota Tercel, acquired at the age of twenty-one. Mine: a BMW 320i, given to me at age sixteen. (Yes, I'm one of *those*.)

So you get the picture. As a necessity, Jon was intimately acquainted with hard work. Expectations were placed on him at an early age to be a man, to work hard, to take responsibility.

Though financially comfortable, my home life also emphasized the value of work. We had a maid, and household chores didn't take a dominant role in my everyday life, but my folks still required their kids to work hard. We were expected to make As on our report cards, to give 100 percent to each task, and to avoid idle time. I was even required to make my bed.

The standards set by our parents taught Jon and me that whatever was expected of us, we could do.

So what if I was the only girl I knew mowing the yard? My dad didn't see this job (or many jobs) as gender specific. Clearly I, like my brothers, had the capacity to fill the self-propelled Toro with gas, fire it up, and create geometric patterns of neatly clipped rows of grass.

My dad hammered home a couple of other principles every time he had a chance: the aforementioned, "If a job is worth doing, it's worth doing well" and "You can do anything you set your mind to." I hear my-

self saying the same things to my kids, but I came to realize I haven't been equipping them to embrace those truths.

Although good intentions pave my road of enabling—I want my children to be happy and their lives to be free of what I might deem unnecessary pain—my actions result in degradation rather than empowerment.

Once, when Snopes asked for help on a fifth-grade English paper, I couldn't stop myself from progressively increasing my involvement. I tried to guide her in coming up with descriptive language, but it took too long. I didn't have time to weather stammering and searching for words. Screaming siblings were vying for my attention. So rather than stand behind her, let her type (as slow as that might be), encourage her to struggle through word choices, and make her correct the errors, I literally pushed her aside and took over the helm in front of the computer. I corrected every grammatical error, filled in missing details, and added creativity to pull the reader into her story. Her report on *Redwall* emerged from its cocoon a beautiful butterfly, a far cry from the hairy caterpillar she had shown me moments earlier.

When she came home from school with the paper that not only sported a huge “97” in glaring red marker (firework marks exploding around the number) but also a note from the teacher on how proud she was of the terrific effort, Snopes looked embarrassed, not proud. It wasn't her work being praised, and she knew it.

I could do nothing more than apologize as I stared in those sad golden eyes. At that moment she could have been the poster child for why we parents should equip rather than enable. I couldn't believe I had fallen into the entitlement trap, even though my longstanding policy has been not to help the kids with their homework because I genuinely want them to pass or fail on their own.

When I step in, fix problems, and do those little household chores (or homework!), I send the message that they *can't* do it themselves. And if they can't do the small things, how will they ever attempt the big things?

So much for my “you’re so great” kudos when they’re rarely backed by actions to prove I believe it. Actions that include transferring sole-proprietor ownership of work to the kids.

When I started the Experiment, I thought my issue centered only on entitlement. Now I recognize that the enemy is not only entitlement but the accompanying low self-esteem, the result of my *implied* message that they aren’t capable. Ouch. The entitlement attitude, seemingly a sign of self-importance and arrogance, actually conceals a cavern of insecurity. You may wonder how they can be insecure since they’ve bought into the belief that “the world revolves around you.” Apparently, much of our children’s self-esteem has been built on a faulty foundation.

In a recent article for the *Atlantic*, Lori Gottlieb interviewed Jean Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University and the coauthor of *The Narcissism Epidemic*. Asked about the ever-rising rate of depression among young people despite elevated views of themselves, Twenge responded: “Narcissists are happy when they’re younger, because they’re the center of the universe.” She further explained:

Their parents act like their servants, shuttling them to any activity they choose and catering to their every desire. Parents are constantly telling their children how special and talented they are. This gives them an inflated view of their specialness compared to other human beings. Instead of feeling good about themselves, they feel better than everyone else.

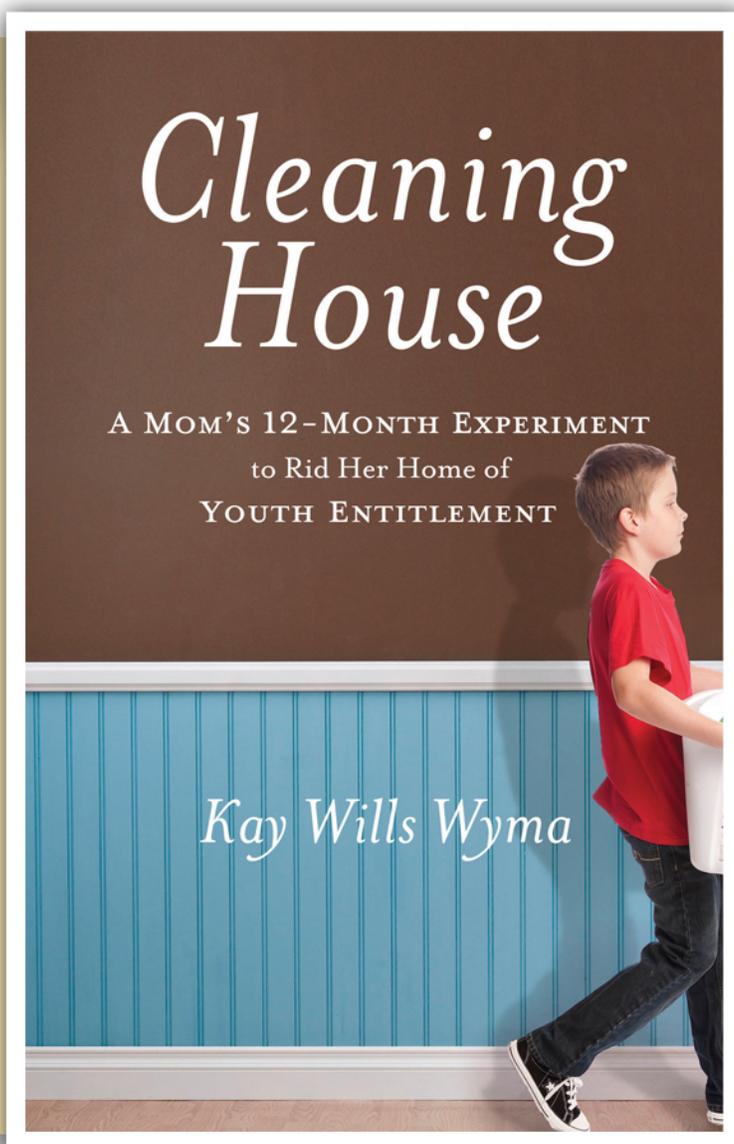
Twenge went on to describe how those ego-boosting efforts of parents result in greater problems as their kids reach adulthood.

People who feel like they’re unusually special end up alienating those around them. They don’t know how to work on teams as well or deal with limits. They get into the workplace and expect to be stimulated all the time, because their worlds were so struc-

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