

## The First Five Seconds!

That is the amount of time it takes to make a “first” impression! When the doorbell rings at a family or group childcare, or childcare center, once you invite the prospective parent in, what the parents see, hear, and smell says a thousand unspoken words to your visitors. Their choice of where to enroll their child will have a major impact upon their child’s and family’s lives!

It does not mean that your home or facility is the newest, most expensive place on the block! What it does mean is that you have maintained your childcare space and have taken time to look at the characteristic and cleanliness of your indoor/outdoor environment.

For you, the most difficult task is to be **objective** in looking at the cleanliness, organization, and atmosphere of your program! To be objective, you need to **stand back** (to decrease emotion) and **take a fresh new look** at every nook and cranny, the entrance, and the outdoor and indoor play spaces in order to plan a methodical approach to cleaning, organizing, and sprucing up! Owners, directors, and teachers should look in each classroom or learning space to see what things should be changed, organized, discarded, or added to make it more healthy and inviting. Sit down or lay down on the floor to see the area from a child’s perspective!



Don’t be afraid to ask a trusted friend or family to do a walk-through and/or complete surveys for suggestions. Sometimes the slightest change will make a positive impact on you, your staff and your families and reflect to the community that you CARE! That is what parents want, need, and deserve!

Take a deep breath, let’s go check out your home or center! Here are questions to help focus:

- Is there a sign at the entrance identifying your program?
- Is the walkway or steps to the entrance well maintained?
- What do parents or clients see when they walk in the door to the program?
- Do they see and hear happy children playing in a safe and clean environment?
- When they enter the home or center, what do they smell?
- Are the toys, shelving, and equipment clean?
- Are windows and walls clean? Are the floors clean and rugs or carpets been vacuumed?
- Are ceiling tiles, ceiling fans and light fixtures clean and in good repair?
- Is the diaper changing area clean and in good repair? Are the restrooms the children use clean?

Spring is when folks normally think about “deep” cleaning, but it can be addressed anytime in family and childcare centers! Good cleaning is an important step in avoiding illnesses and

injuries in any setting. Use environmentally 'friendly' cleaners as people of all ages are susceptible to improper exposures to chemicals and scents.

Here are some helpful hints for "deep cleaning" that some sites use:

1. Start high, go low: look up to see the condition of ceilings, ceiling fans.
2. Windows: use window cleaner and paper towels to clean your windows inside and out. You may be surprised at the sparkle and brightness that follows!
3. Curtains, shades, blinds: dust and/or wash blinds and shades. Take curtains down and wash in washing machine.
4. Refresh your floors: move furnishings and dust, vacuum, and wet mop floor. Try to get into the corners!
5. Walls: Take down stickers, posters, decals, art-work. Wash down walls with an all-natural cleaner.
6. Tidy-up and de-clutter: set up a closet to store the extra 'stuff' that happens. (Doing this will help to alleviate stress for staff and children!)
7. Consider using air purifiers in each room to lift out odors, pollen, germs, etc. from the air.
8. Remember that any toys that have been 'mouthed' by children should be put into "soiled bins" and cleaned properly before another child may use them.
9. One family provider has a simple schedule to clean:
  - a. Monday-all dress up clothes
  - b. Tuesday-all doll houses/ blocks and accessories
  - c. Wednesday-all board books, puzzles, manipulatives
  - d. Thursday-dramatic play equipment (tables, kitchen set, high chairs, etc.)
  - e. Friday-wipe down all surfaces, launder pillows and tablecloths, dust and vacuum.
10. Use daily, weekly, and/or monthly cleaning and/or disinfecting schedules.
  - a. **Check out the attachments for samples of:**
    - i. A daily checklist,
    - ii. A weekly cleaning schedule, and,
    - iii. A Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting Frequency Table. Please use them as is or adapt them to your particular site needs.

