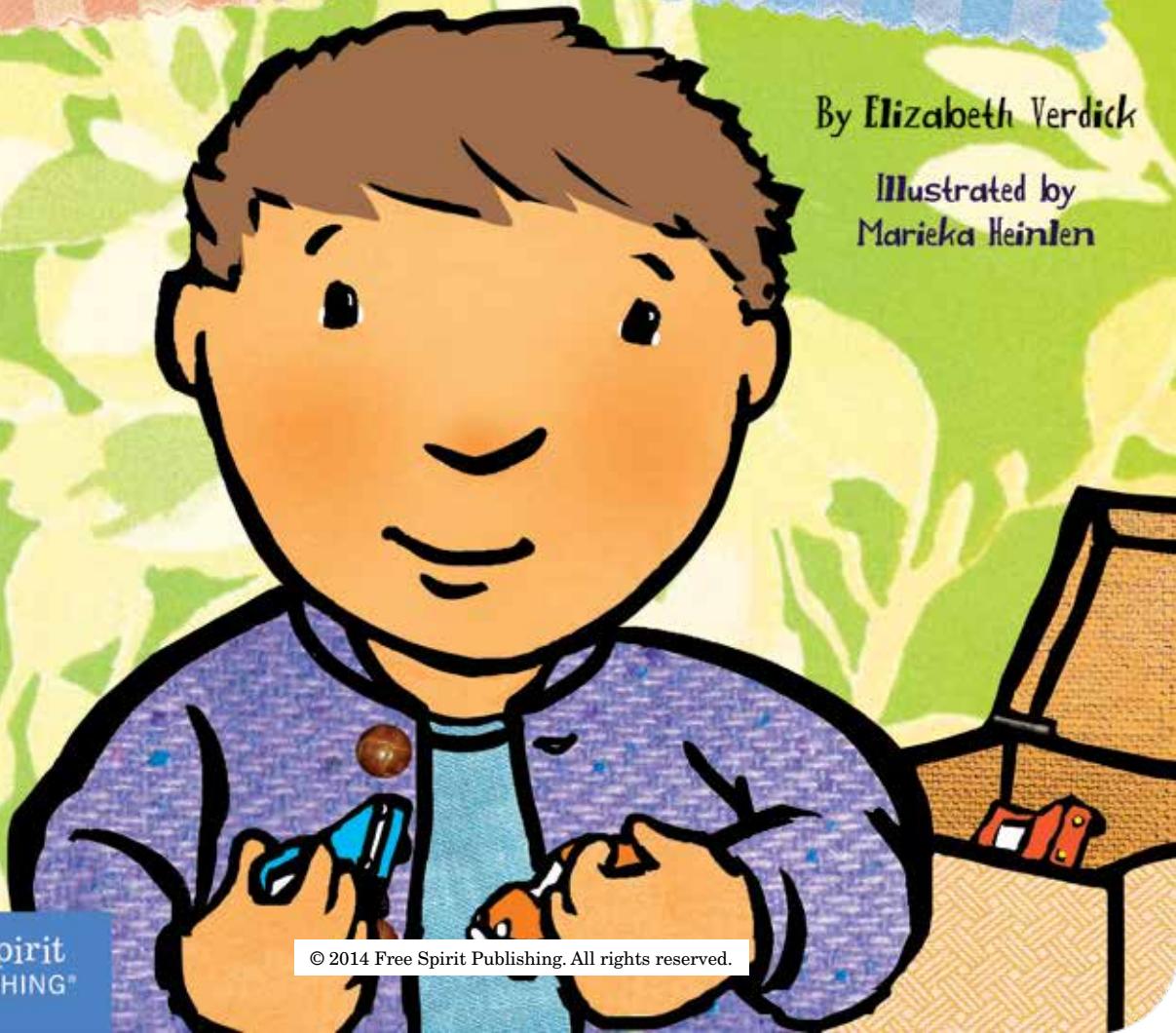


# Clean-Up Time

By Elizabeth Verdick

Illustrated by  
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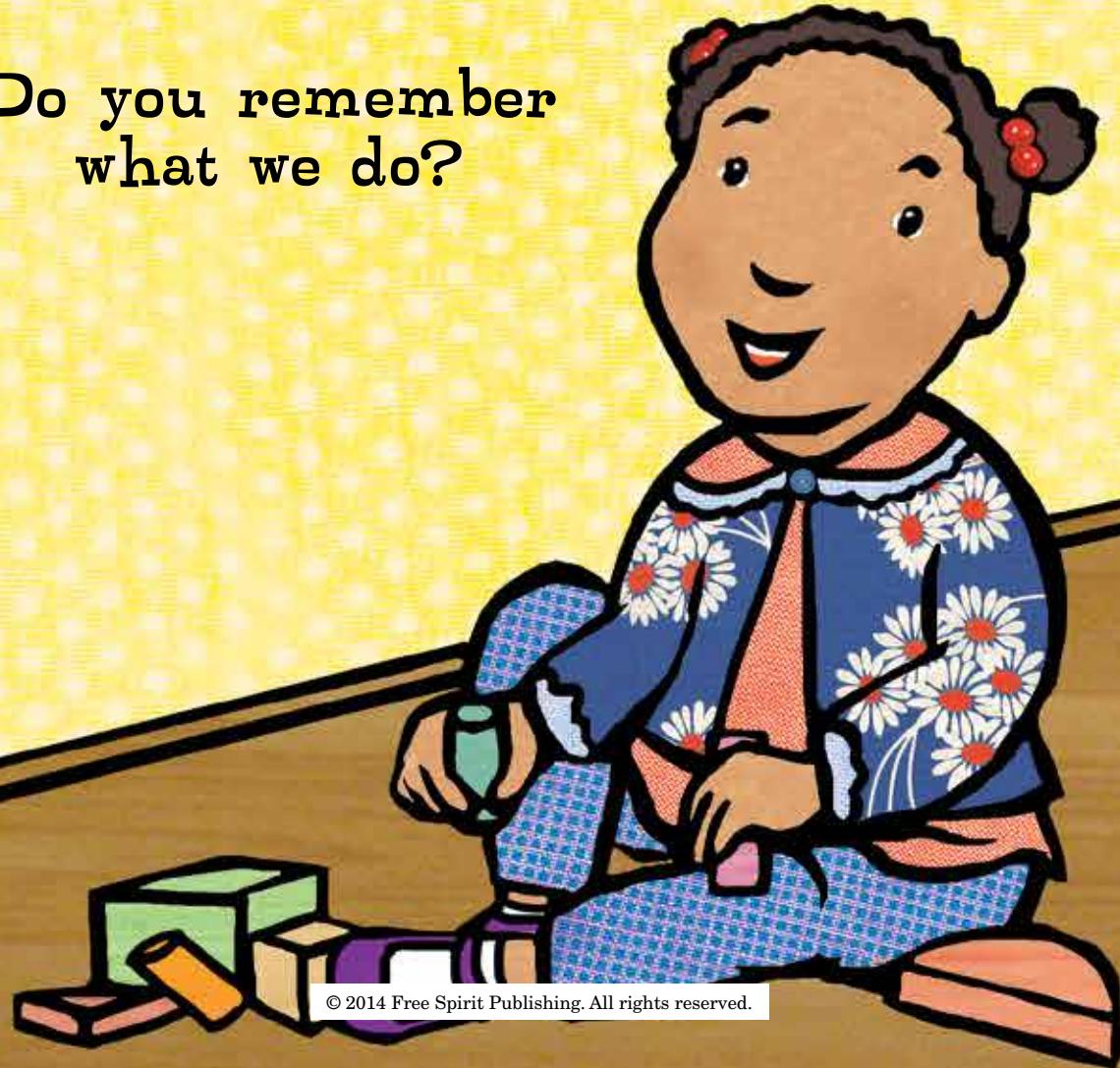
Clean-up  
time!



It's clean-up time.

Do you remember  
what we do?

**Yes!** We remember.



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# Clean-Up Tips for Parents & Caregivers

Toddlers are busy people. They're always on the move as they play, experiment, explore—and leave a trail of toys and unfinished activities behind them. To stay on top of the big messes little children make, turn clean-up time into a regular part of their routine:

**Make it quick.** Plan to spend only a few minutes on clean-up with toddlers. Make it easy for them to know where different toys and activities belong. For example, store puzzles on a shelf, blocks in a bin, and stuffed animals in baskets. Create storage spaces that are easy to reach and have labels young children can understand. To keep it simple, assign a specific task: “It’s time to put the trains away. They go in this box. Can you put them in there, please?” Even if you end up doing most of the work, your toddler will be taking first steps in learning the skill of cleaning up.

**Expect some resistance.** Few of us get excited about the prospect of cleaning up, and toddlers are no exception. Set a positive example. Keep smiling to show that tidying up is simply part of the day’s routine.

**Explain the benefits.** Point out that putting away toys means they’re less likely to get lost or broken. Plus, cleaning up clears the way for a new activity and more fun.

**Be realistic.** Young children often start an activity, leave it for a while, and then come back later. Allow the opportunity to keep an unfinished project out for later use. (You may want to place it out of harm’s way, though.) No toddler will ever be as neat as a pin or put every toy away. Adjust your expectations accordingly.

**Break it down.** A child can become overwhelmed by a room strewn with toys and games. Help by turning tasks into manageable steps: “Let’s start with putting books on the shelf, and then we’ll pick up the crayons.” Work together step by step, and take breaks to notice how much you’ve accomplished.

**Have fun while you get the job done.** Play music, sing a special clean-up song, hum, tell jokes, set a timer and have a race. When clean-up feels like a game, children are more likely to join in and enjoy themselves. Offer compliments as you work: “Wow, you sure got that done fast!” or “What a speedy cleaner-upper you are!” Give high fives or hugs when the work is finished—then move on to the next bit of fun.



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