EXCLUSIVE SURVEY
LIFE IN A SPECIAL-NEEDS WORLD

how every parent can help kids of all abilities thrive

10 THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER SAY TO YOUR KID

FUN NEW EASTER TRADITIONS

WHEN YOUR CHILD’S COUGH IS A WARNING SIGN

* cut your housecleaning time in half!

siblings Chloe and Daniel Molina, ages 3 and 5, both have autism.
23 Clean Discoveries

A Parents poll shows most moms spend 15 hours or more each week sponging, sweeping, and vacuuming. (Is that all?) Slash that time—while you cut through grime—with these clever tricks and products for every room in your home.

"Get a dog. It’s the single most effective tidy-up tool after meals."

Kim Woltmann, mom of one;
Los Angeles, CA

by AMY ROBERTS
Your Kitchen
The room that’s the heart of the home is also its most mess-prone. Food prep plus eating is a recipe for sticky counters, gritty floors, and crud everywhere else.

2 / The best thing you can do to keep kitchen countertops clean is to keep them dry—bacteria thrive in wet environments, says Donna Smallin, author of The One-Minute Cleaner.

3 / If you catch an oven spill when it’s still fresh, pour salt on it, Smallin suggests. It’ll cut down on the burnt stench and create a crust—making it easier to scrape up when it’s cool.

4 / A clever cutout lets you hang Libman’s durable Variety Sponge Pack ($4.50 for three; libman.com for stores) on a dish drainer or faucet for rapid drying.

5 / Try Smallin’s tip to clean the oven when you don’t want to run—or don’t have—a self-cleaning cycle. Heat the oven until it reaches 200°F, then turn it off. Fill a small bowl with ammonia and place it on the center rack. Close the door and leave the bowl overnight. The fumes will soften grime; then all you’ll need are hot water and a squirt of grease-cutting dish soap, such as Dawn or Palmolive, to clear it away.

6 / Attack a grimy microwave with steam. Zap 2 cups of water in a microwave-safe bowl for five minutes. Let it sit for a few minutes; then wipe inside surfaces with a sponge. Keep it clean with Cadie’s Oven Cleaning Wipes ($7 for 20 wipes; jensco.com), which use sweet-smelling, natural orange oil to rid walls of baked-on gunk.

7 / The new Clorox 4-in-One Disinfecting Spray ($5; clorox.com) not only kills germs on hard surfaces but also reduces allergens and sanitizes soft surfaces, like mattresses and upholstery. Spray as directed almost anywhere—germy hands have been.

8 / Windex Touch-Up Cleaner (shown below, $4; scjohnson.com for stores) has a sleek dispenser that’s pretty enough to be left out, so you can tap the top to get a burst of multi-surface cleaner for fast wipe-downs.

DIY RECIPES FOR CLEAN

All-Purpose Cleaner
Use this nearly anywhere you would use your usual cleanser (just avoid stone surfaces). In a bucket or a spray bottle, combine 2 parts water, 1 part white vinegar, and a few drops of an essential oil, like lavender (the scent masks the vinegar smell).

Degreaser
Tackle grungy stovetops and cabinets. Mix 4 parts water with 1 part ammonia.

Gentle Scouring Powder
Switch out harsh scouring powders with kid-safe, scratch-free baking soda.

Soap-Scum Remover
Cut through soap scum naturally. Slice a lemon or a grapefruit in half, coat with kosher salt, and use it to scrub tiles and tub surfaces.
Your Bathroom
Tackle soap scum, mildew, stained grout, and more to make the place where your family gets clean spotless.

10 A quick sink wipe-down should be a part of your routine, just like brushing your teeth. Casabella’s colorful microfiber sponges (at right, $10 for six; casabella.com) are attractive enough to leave out for daily use.

11 Swap your standard showerhead for a handheld model to make easier work of wetting and rinsing shower and tub walls, says Jolie Kerr, author of My Boyfriend Barfed in My Handbag... and Other Things You Can’t Ask Martha.

12 Or try this bathroom-wall cleaning trick from Lisa Quinn, author of Life’s Too Short to Fold Fitted Sheets: Rub white candles on grout. With a coat of wax, a light spray of glass cleaner on a rag or sponge is all you need to prevent mold and mildew buildup.

13 When it’s time for a thorough tub scrub, most of our experts agree that Scrubbing Bubbles cuts through soap scum like nothing else. If you prefer a natural alternative, try the Soap-Scum Remover recipe on page 122.

14 You’ve heard it before: Use a squeegee to whisk water from shower walls after you bathe. It discourages both soap-scum and mildew buildup. We love Quirky’s Squeak (below), which acts as a squeegee, a cleaning pad, and a cleaning-liquid dispenser all in one. $20; quirky.com

15 File this under “what took them so long?” Scotch-Brite’s Upturned Bristles Toilet Bowl Brush (below, $6.50; scotch-brite.com) easily gets under the rim, a spot that’s often tricky to reach.

16 To clean floor-tile grout, Kerr recommends dissolving 1 cup OxiClean in 2 gallons of water. Saturate tiles and let sit for 15 minutes. Then swab, scrub, and rinse as usual.

17 Periodically wash plastic shower curtains in the washer with hot water and detergent, Smallin says. Throw your rags and sponges into the same load: the washer’s agitation will rub them against the plastic to clear off the scum.
Family Spaces

"I spray Nature's Miracle on most upholstery stains. It gets anything out: frosting, ink, snot, salsa..." - Valerie Nolan, mom of one, Winchester, MA

Floor It
We tested the latest gadgets to find the right tools for your home's carpet, tile, and wood.

Best Multitasker
Bissell Symphony All in One Vacuum and Steam Mop, $219; bissell.com. This combination tool lets you suck and steam separately or simultaneously. It works on nearly all your floor surfaces.

Most Allergy-Friendly
Soniclean VT Plus, $200; mysoniclean.com. Get deep cleaning without the bulk—this sucker weighs in at a mere 10½ pounds—and maneuvers with ease. Its HEPA filtration system traps bacteria, dust, dirt, and other allergens.

Best Compact
Shark Rocket Ultra-Light Upright, $180; sharkclean.com. Just as powerful as its full-size counterparts, this mini model converts from a handheld to an upright vac in seconds.

Best "Green" Clean
Steamboy Pro T3, $109; reliablecorporation.com. Clean and sanitize both hard surfaces and carpets using only water with this efficient steam mop. The chemical-free germ-buster is perfect for a home with a crawler.

Master of Daily Maintenance
iRobot Braava 380t Floor Mopping Robot, $300; irobot.com. This floor-cleaning robot is like a superpowered Swiffer, offering both dry and damp mopping features to maintain hard floors.

Your Living Room and Bedroom
These spaces have a lot in common: soft, comfy furniture, plush carpeting, and personal clutter. They also share the cleaning challenges of upholstery stains, dirty carpeting, and dust.

19 / Kerr suggests stashing oversize lint rollers ($5; evercare.com for stores) in side-table drawers for pet-hair and general fuzz removal from upholstery and bedspreads.

20 / Clean mirrors and picture-frame glass by spraying glass cleaner on the rag (not on the glass), to prevent cleaner buildup in frame corners or droplets on walls, Kerr says.

21 / Take a cue from Geneva Vaughan, director of housekeeping at Holiday Inn Gwinnett Center, near Atlanta: vacuum after dusting, so you'll get up any dust that's settled to the ground. Start with the corner opposite the door so you won't track dirt back into your freshly groomed wall-to-wall.

22 / If you have pets, spray an antistatic spray, like Static Guard, lightly on your carpet or furniture a few minutes before vacuuming so fur comes up more easily, Smallin says.

23 / Orphaned socks are handy for dusting tricky shapes like window blinds and baseboards, says Smallin. Get your kids involved by giving them each a sock and challenging them to see who can make their "puppet" the dirtiest.