

Having your Child help with Chores

Many parents have their children help with chores. Giving children chores is a good way to teach them basic life skills and simple day to day tasks. It also teaches children that jobs around the house do not miraculously get done by themselves, and that chores are a part of everyday life. Doing chores teaches children important skills such as cooperation, responsibility and even to some extent, time management and team building.

One of the most important duties of a good parent is to prepare children to function well in the world. Chores can be a part of that preparation. If you start including your child in daily or weekly chores when they are young, they will quickly begin to understand that there are certain jobs that must be done to run a household. When a child is young, even as early as 1 year, you can easily make a game of picking up toys. Kids love to imitate; this is how they learn at an early stage. Children 2-4 years old can accomplish simple tasks such as putting toys and books away, putting clothes in a hamper and helping with dusting. Older children 5-7 years can handle more challenging tasks. For example, feeding the family pet, helping set and clear the table, making their beds and putting toys and books away. Eight to ten year olds are capable of sweeping a floor, watering plants, dusting, setting and clearing a table, helping with laundry and keeping their rooms tidy and beds made. Children 10 years of age and older are capable of more challenging tasks. They are able to do dishes (whether by hand or loading and unloading a dishwasher), sweeping, vacuuming, cleaning the bathroom, dusting and helping with laundry (folding and putting away clothes as well as sorting dirty clothes into appropriate piles and putting in the washer and dryer).

Here are a few suggestions to involve your child with chores.

1. Make a chart. This will help remind the child of what is expected of them. Put it in a spot that they are likely to see often. (Use pictures for little ones not yet reading).
2. Start early. Start with one simple task and add more challenging ones as they mature. Do not redo a chore your child has done. For example, your 3 year old has folded all of the towels and, of course, they are not so neatly done. Praise the child for a job well done and put them away as is. If you refold them, the child may not want to try again. This could also wound their self esteem. If they see you putting them away as is, they will more likely than not want to tell everyone who uses a towel that they folded it and will want to do it again. (Don't worry; eventually the towels will get folded properly).
3. Explain what to do. Children learn by watching. Show them how to do one chore at a time. When they have mastered it, add a new task. Explaining why we do certain chores will give them a better understanding as to why they are helping and the contributing. They will begin to understand that the floor doesn't sweep itself, and that someone has to do it.

4. Do not do the chore if your child forgets or refuses. This will only teach the child that you do not mean what you say, and that if they wait long enough someone will do their work for them. In my own home, if the dishes are not done, I do not begin to prepare the next meal. When the kids start asking “When are we eating?” I will tell them that I have no counter space or dishes to prepare the meal because someone didn’t do their job. This, then, becomes an excellent way to show the consequence to their actions or rather, inactions. Harsh words need not be spoken, but believe you me, the chores get done fairly quickly when they know meal time is at stake!
5. As mentioned above, consequences are important (whether positive or negative). For example, if a child refuses to do his or her chores they may have a privilege taken away. On the other hand, if you have a child who consistently does their chores they may be given a reward.
6. Give lots of praise! Praise your child for remembering to do their chore. Praise them for a job well done. When your child is making an honest effort give them encouragement and positive reinforcement. This will go along way in building their confidence and self esteem.

And finally, do not underestimate your child; they are more capable than you may realize!

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