

Did You Know?

Age Appropriate Chores

The Value of Making a Contribution to the Family

Many parents are confused about the issue of chores and young children. Allowing or encouraging children to help out at home can take more time, rather than less, sometimes. But there is a bigger issue involved: teaching children responsibility and value of making a contribution to the family.

Helping Out Builds Character

When “times were tougher,” everyone really had to pitch in and help. Children learned early on that hard work and perseverance are just a normal part of life. Today, things are very different. We can give our kids a lot more, so we don't need to ask as much from them. As a result, many children don't get the chance to learn at home the value of struggling hard for something. Children don't get the opportunity to contribute. Instead, they learn to expect that things will come to them with little effort or initiative on their part. Therapists often notice that kids who have drug and alcohol problems are those who have never been given the “gift” of purpose or struggle. They have fallen into the trap of believing that good feelings come from the outside, rather than from the inside.

To develop a really strong sense of self-confidence, children have to try some things that are hard for them. They have to struggle a bit and be encouraged by those who love them and then look back on their success with a sense of pride. This is something that no one else can do for a child. A child must experience it for himself!

Helping Out Teaches Children That They Are Valuable Helpers

With our encouragement, young children can take on more and more responsibility for themselves. They can begin by picking out their clothes and putting their toys away. Then they can move on to doing simple chores that help the whole family. What a good feeling it can be for them to know that it's not only adults who are the “helpers,” but that children can be “helpers,” too. They feel important and capable. When children know their help is valuable, they *feel* valued—which means they are more likely to do helpful things for others in the future.

Helping Out Teaches Children That They Belong and Are Valuable Members of the Family

Too many kids today lack a sense of belonging or of being needed by their families. The consequence of our high-stress life-style means less time spent together, both in work and in play. This contributes to children feeling less connected. When children don't get this feeling at home, they seek it out in other places. Who would think that children would feel more connected to their family by having to do chores? But it's true. In my practice, I have seen how children who come from families where there is the *expectation* that they help out in a significant way feel much more connected to their family. They know their contribution is important. They don't necessarily like their jobs, but they experience that they belong and are needed. They see how their family functions better because each person carries a part of the work. Outsiders can feel the difference in these families: it's a sense of family unity.

To Pay for Chores or Not to Pay?

Some families believe that helping is part of a child's responsibility to the whole family, so no allowance is paid for specific jobs. Often those families pay an allowance separately, but it is not tied to doing chores. Other families feel that a child's chores are his or her work jobs, so pay is earned for specific tasks. Each family must decide for themselves. But remember, no matter what approach you take, young children feel encouraged when their behavior is noticed and rewarded in a *positive* way. The more immediate and the more visual the reward, the better! Putting stars (or stickers) on a chart, putting marbles in a bottle, or giving a big hug for a job completed can add tremendously to a child's motivation. Don't forget to reward with “Mom or Dad-time,” too. This can be the best treat of all!

Struggle
+
Encouragement from
Others
+
Accomplishment
=
Healthy Self-Concept

(From Love and Logic Parenting)

How to Get Your Kids To Do Chores

Dr. Charles Fay, author of *Love and Logic Parenting for Early Childhood*, suggests these ideas for “giving your children the gift of struggle through chores”:

- 1 As soon as your child can walk, start working together.** Have fun working and playing together. Dust furniture, wipe up spills, fold clothes together, etc. Always say “please” and “thank you.” This encourages your kids to say it, too. Do your best to help your young child to associate chores with good feelings, rather than bad ones. Most important of all, TRY NOT TO CRITICIZE. Focus on your child’s efforts, not the quality of what she’s done. Make positive comments, such as “Wow! You’re really working hard!”
- 2 Model doing your own chores in front of kids.** Be sure your kids see you working hard, doing chores, and struggling a bit to do hard things. Make sure they see how good you feel once your chores are finished. Let them know your sense of accomplishment. Talk and think out loud. This is a great tool to use with young children. For example, you might say, “Ok... I’ve just got to do it. This is hard. But I’m doing it. Wow! I’m almost finished. Now I’m done and I feel great!” It’s really important for children to know that we don’t always like the tasks we have to do, but we have to do them anyway. Lying only creates resentment later on. Be positive, but be honest.
- 3 Develop a “Toy Time-Out Box” or a “Toy Bermuda Triangle.”** Consider this as a strategy for teaching kids to put their toys away. When your young child leaves toys lying around after you have requested he put them away, they go right to the “Toy Time-Out Box” or the “Toy Bermuda Triangle.” Dr. Fay suggests this dialogue: “Where are my toys?” your child asks. How do you respond? “When you pick up your toys, you get to keep them. When I pick you your toys, they go into my closet. How are you going to earn them back?”
- 4 Give choices about age-appropriate chores. Try not to say “Do it now.”** Offer your child a choice in chores. This is important because it gives your child some power. Your child must choose between two chores, either of which is okay with you: “Would you like to put away the silverware or put the napkins on the table?” Instead of saying, “Do it now!” offer your child some control by letting him choose between two different deadlines: “Do you want to do it now...or when it’s 5:00? I’ll show you what 5:00 looks like on the clock.” Giving your child some time to plan gives you some time to plan what you’ll do if he forgets or refuses.
- 5 Hope that your kids forget or refuse to do their chores when they are still very young.** When your child forgets, give your child the gift of “thinking” to learn consequences. (There is nothing that teaches responsibility and builds confidence faster.)

Remember...

When children are very young, the quality isn’t as important as the effort. And please don’t forget to say, “Thank you!”

First, try to help kids solve the problem themselves.

5 STEPS TO HELP KIDS OWN & SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS:

- **Lock in the empathy.** (“Oh, no. This is so sad...” or, “Oh no...too bad. You forgot!”)
- **Ask your child, “What are you going to do?”** (“How are you going to make up for this?”)
- **When your child says, “I don’t know,” ask, “Would you like to hear some ideas?”**
- **Offer no more than three possible solutions. After each one, ask, “How would that work for you?”** (For example: “You could tear the lettuce for the salad. How would that work for you?” “Or, you could clean the sink in the bathroom. How would that work for you?” etc.)
- **Allow your child to choose—and to learn from the choice and from your empathy.**

Questions cause kids to THINK.

Commands cause children to RESIST.

Second, try the “Brain Drain.”

You can use the Brain Drain strategy when you want a creative solution for a consequence. The parent says, “What an energy drain. When you forget to do your chores, it makes more work for me. It really tires me out. How are you planning to put this energy back into me?” When the child says, “I don’t know,” give her some possible options. Doing extra chores is a great ‘recharging strategy.’

Third, you choose an appropriate consequence. We want our children to learn these important lessons now, at an early age, when the price tag is still low. By the time they get to be teenagers and young adults, they will have a distinct advantage over their peers because they will know how to do chores *without* reminders! Sometimes, the only appropriate response is for us to choose the consequence for our child, such as removing a privilege, taking away the “offending item,” assigning another “helping” task, or paying less allowance at the end of the week.

AGE-APPROPRIATE CHORES

What are Age-Appropriate Chores?

Each child has his own timetable, so ages are suggested and approximate. Ages are on the early side. For boys, who mature more slowly, you may want to add 6 months to ages given. Start with a simple chore and work up to more difficult tasks. Spend two times working side by side on a chore, calmly and patiently demonstrating. The third time, step back and let the child do it alone. If it's done right, give a 'high five' and hugs! If not, give a hug and teach again.

1 1/2 Years

- Get diaper for self
- Put disposable diaper in trash
- Pick up small items from floor
- Shut cabinet doors
- Turn on dishwasher

2 Years

- Put away toys
- Get diaper for self or new baby
- Unload dishwasher of plastic dishes
- Put napkins on table
- Fold washcloths
- Take things to the trash

2 1/2 Years

- "Fold" napkins
- Help set table
- Match socks
- Put away silverware (no knives)
- Wash vegetables
- Pour measured items into mixing bowl
- Sweep dry messes with a small broom
- Put away broom and dustpan

3 Years

- Dust lower shelves and low tables (put an old sock over a child's hand and spray with polish)
- Empty small trash cans
- Carry stacks of clothes to rooms
- Help make the bed (pull covers up)
- Hang clothing on hooks
- Carry laundry to and from the laundry area
- Help feed the animals
- Help wipe up spills
- Bring in the newspaper
- Water garden

4 Years

- Put away books
- Dust higher shelves
- Make own bed
- Set the table
- Clear dishes from the table
- Tear lettuce for salad
- Retrieve the mail
- Dust the furniture
- Help carry and put away groceries
- Pull weeds in garden
- Empty waste baskets
- Sort recyclables

5 Years

- Make bed
- Set table/clear table
- Put leftover food away after a meal
- Feed pets
- Fold laundry
- General straightening of rooms

6 Years

- Pour milk for family meals
- Make the salad
- Empty trash
- Weed
- Fold laundry and take to rooms
- Polish silver and brass

7 Years

- Load dishwasher
- Open cans
- Help with grocery shopping
- Cook simple foods
- Help wash the car
- Sweep floor
- Clean bathroom sinks
- Rake leaves
- Use the washer and dryer
- Take out the trash

8 Years

- Complete responsibility for their room (daily)
- Wash pots and pans
- Clean bathroom completely
- Wash windows
- Vacuum
- Sweep and mop floor
- Sew buttons
- Help with grocery list

9-10 Years

- Change baby's diapers
- Clean out refrigerator
- Help with meal planning
- Cook more complex meals
- Wash /vacuum car

11+ Years

By this age, a child should be able to learn any skill, as long as you are willing to teach him/her. Certain skills (i.e.: lawn mowing, babysitting for siblings) will depend on maturity level and/or family circumstances. Parents know best

I'm a Good Helper

Chore Chart



Name _____

Week _____

CHORES	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total
Taking Care of Myself								
Taking Care of My Things								
Taking Care of My Home								
Helping Others								

A **SPECIAL PRIVILEGE** I earned this week:

Allowance I earned this week:
\$

