Household Chores and Your Child

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Learning about responsibility begins at home.

Getting your child to help out with household chores on a regular basis can be beneficial for him to grow into a successful adult. This is due to a sense of self-worth and competency, and he will also be more responsible in other aspects of his life. Another benefit is that he will be more likely to have better self-esteem and it also makes him feel like a part of the family. Indirectly, this will teach him about the importance of family responsibility.

Getting started

Before starting off, there are several points to keep in mind, namely:

- The importance of chores (as parents, you must take the initiative and effort to teach your child how to do them).
- The household chores should be appropriate for his age/capability.
- He should be involved in choosing which household chores he will be in charge of.
- The younger you start your child off doing household chores, the easier it will be to get him to continue as he grows.
- It gives you an opportunity to spend time with him and to bond.
- It gives him the foundation for being a responsible adult.
- It lets him gain a sense of self-worth, accomplishment, living skills, and competency.
- It teaches him responsibility (doing chores without being told/reminded).

You can start coaxing your child by breaking up the household chores into simple tasks. Let him try doing them and see which ones he prefers. Remember, he will be more likely to continue doing household chores if it is done together as a family – working side-by-side together is much more enjoyable and can make the chores less arduous. Of course, failure to be responsible for his assigned chores must also have logical consequences, and similarly praise him when his chores are done well (don’t be afraid to be specific).

Pitfalls to avoid

Try to make household chores more fun by encouraging your child with positive comments (such as “I love washing dishes with you. It feels great to have a clean kitchen.”)

You should also show him how you want the chores done correctly without patronising or belittling him. For instance, if he has made his bed improperly, you can tell him “You have an interesting way to make your bed. Would you like me to show you how I get the wrinkles out when I make my bed?”

As parents, you should encourage your child’s efforts. In the beginning, you should focus on the process rather than the quality of his work. Your praise and your appreciation of his efforts will help him to feel that he is contributing important work to the family.
In order to encourage your child to persist in continuing to do his household chores, there are several important pitfalls that you should avoid, which include:

**No such thing as perfection** — take a more relaxed approach in how you gauge his performance of his chores. Insisting on perfection will soon squash any enthusiasm he may have for it, making it an onerous duty that he will try to shirk.

**No reason to delay** — you child is never too young to start! Most children are more capable than you think. However, be sure to start with simple things and progressing to more complex chores as you go. After all, the best way to learn is by seeing and doing.

**Don’t use chores as a punishment** — this will usually have negative results as it can lead to your child resenting and/or hating his chores.

**Keeping the momentum**

Now that you know what to avoid, it will be helpful if you also took some proactive steps to encourage your child. These include:

**Remember to praise his efforts** — don’t wait until he finishes it, praise and encourage him while he is doing it. This will help to build a positive momentum, especially if your child is still young.

**Be consistent!** Make sure that your child follows through with his chores and don’t step in to do it for him, otherwise, he will learn the wrong lesson (that putting off his chores means someone else will do it for him).

**Give specific instructions** — for instance, if you tell your child to clean his room, this can be interpreted in different ways by different individuals. Be specific and give him instructions, e.g. tell him to put his clothes in his closet, his books back onto the shelf, and his toys back into their respective niches.

**Take baby steps** — show him how you want it done step by step, then let him do it. Always ease him into any new chores. You may want to supervise him the first few times, but once he has got it right, you won’t need to hover over his shoulder.

**Take it easy** — nagging can have rather negative results, so try using the “when/then” technique (e.g. tell your child that when he has finished putting away his toys, then he can watch his cartoons).

**Give him a choice** — list out all the household chores and let him to select the ones he prefers to do.

Should chores be tied to an allowance?

The key point to keep in mind is that chores are about responsibility and also imparting simple household skills to your child. With that in mind, it is generally a bad idea to give your child an allowance in exchange for household chores as this has negative connotations.

Doing so places the focus on the payoff for the chore instead of his contribution to the family. This will teach your child a negative lesson as he will miss the whole point of doing household chores and instead start to ask “What’s in it for me?”

**Allowing allowances**

Yes, it is important that your child learns how to handle money. You can give your child an allowance to teach him simple money-management skills, but do not mix the two (allowances and chores) together as it will muddy the issue.

Don’t equate doing household chores with ‘earning’ money, especially with younger kids. However, this concept may be an exception for older children as earning extra allowance for doing extra chores (especially those that are not a part of his normal chores) can be a good motivating factor.

**Chores should be age-appropriate**

If you are unsure of the types of chores you can assign, here are some ideas you can put to immediate use:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ages 2 to 3</th>
<th>ages 4 to 5</th>
<th>ages 6 to 7</th>
<th>ages 8 to 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Put his toys away</td>
<td>Any of the chores from the left hand column</td>
<td>Any of the chores from the left hand column</td>
<td>Any of the chores from the left hand column</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fill a pet’s food dish</td>
<td>Make his bed</td>
<td>Sort laundry</td>
<td>Help make dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put his clothes in the laundry basket</td>
<td>Empty a dustbin/wastepaper basket</td>
<td>Sweep the floor</td>
<td>Make own snacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wipe up spills</td>
<td>Bring in the mail/newspaper</td>
<td>Set and clear table</td>
<td>Wash snacks after meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help to wipe dust</td>
<td>Clear the dishes from the dining table</td>
<td>Keep bedroom tidy</td>
<td>Put away own laundry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organise books and magazines</td>
<td>Gardening (pulling weeds, watering plants, etc.)</td>
<td>Put away groceries</td>
<td>Make own breakfast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remember, this is a learning process for your child. Always encourage his initiative and encourage him to have more personal responsibility. **PP**