



Inspire Children to Help with Chores

In the beginning:

- Start when your children first express interest in helping with household tasks, usually between ages 1-1/2 and 3. If you missed that stage, you can start at any age to teach the concept that work is something the family shares.
- Make tasks manageable with a clear beginning and end. Don't add on another when the first is completed.
- Choose beginning tasks at which it is easy to succeed on some level – tearing lettuce for a salad, folding laundry, sweeping the kitchen floor.
- Teach children how to do a job. Demonstrate, practice with them; and then withdraw.
- Offer choices rather than state a command. Instead of telling Matthew to pick up his airplane, ask him whether he wants to put it on the top or the bottom shelf.

Once underway:

- Thank children for what they do, rather than complain about what is left undone.
- Give an incentive to finish. Link pleasure to responsibilities – setting the table goes with eating; cleaning up the yard goes with playing there.
- Find the fun in jobs. Rake leaves to see how high you can make the pile.
- Learn to love a lumpy bed. Standards that are too high will cause children to fail. Redoing children's work takes away pride and incentive.
- Focus on progress, not perfection. The goal is to teach how to do tasks and instill the value of sharing family work.



Plan ahead:

- Have regular times when the family plans the week's work. Ask children to contribute their ideas about what needs to be done. Let each person pick one to three chores to do for one week.
- Rotate the least liked chores. No one wants to get stuck cleaning the bathroom every week.
- Be non-sexist in assigning jobs. Boys can wash dishes; girls can rake leaves.
- Set patterns so work is part of the daily routine. Example: family straighten-up-the-house time before the evening meal.
- Loosen the reins for children who have been doing family work. They can be given more responsibility without parental interference. Teens may be able to plan menus and grocery shop.



Deal with problems:

- Establish deadlines – no play time until the child's room is picked up, beds made, or clothes put away.
- Establish logical consequences. Work not done means giving up computer, TV, or phone; time with friends; or other entertainment until the tasks are done.
- Reschedule as necessary. Sometimes work piles up when older children have busy schedules. Don't fall into the pity trap and do the work yourself.
- Be prepared for tantrums. Children who haven't done much family work may find it is hard to begin doing some jobs previously done by mom or dad.
- Be sensitive to older children who may be embarrassed because they don't know how to wash dishes, cook, or operate the washer. Take time to train them and don't expect perfection.

Don't give up:

Remember, you are teaching your children life skills. This doesn't happen overnight nor is it easy. But the end result for everyone far outweighs the extra time and effort.

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