

## HELPING OUT

Just the mention of doing chores causes most kids to roll their eyes and protest. After all, no one likes taking out the trash or doing the dishes. However, chores need to get done and it's only fair that each member of the family does their share. Getting kids to help out makes life easier for parents and also benefits children in many ways.

Pitching in with household chores can boost a child's self-esteem by making them feel that they are contributing to the family. Completing tasks may give them a sense of accomplishment while increasing their confidence. Parents send a message that they trust their child's ability to handle things when they allow them to set the table or sweep the kitchen even if it isn't done perfectly. Requiring kids to help out also teaches them to be responsible and that life isn't all about play. Children need to be made aware that messes don't disappear magically and must be cleaned up by someone (ideally the mess maker!).

Despite the positive aspects of having kids do their share, current research indicates that they are actually doing less work in the household than before. One of the main reasons is that both parents and children lead busier lives. Some parents feel that they don't have enough time to teach kids how to perform tasks correctly and believe they can do the job better and faster themselves. Allowing their kids to get away with not doing chores is also less of a hassle. Parents can avoid confrontations and are not wasting their time nagging kids who refuse to clean up. Children also argue that they don't have enough time to perform chores since they are too busy with schoolwork and extra-curricular activities.

Many psychologists are concerned about this growing trend of allowing kids to slack off. They believe that adopting a relaxed policy about doing chores may actually harm children in the long run. Kids who never learn to help out may grow into adulthood feeling that they don't have to work for things. They are also less self-sufficient since someone else has always done the dirty work for them. In order to avoid this type of dependency, experts suggest teaching kids skills as early as possible. Even two year olds can learn simple tasks such as cleaning up toys and putting dirty clothes in a laundry basket.

Chores must be age appropriate in order to prevent children from getting frustrated. For example, a preschooler can help sort the laundry but will probably not be able to make their own bed until they are in kindergarten. It's also important to be specific when assigning tasks to young children. Kids are more likely to cooperate if you ask them to put all of the Legos in a container instead of issuing a broad directive to clean up their mess. Small children may be overwhelmed by the concept of cleaning up a room littered with toys. Breaking down the task into smaller components will help them understand what is required of them. In addition, parents need to work alongside their children until they get the hang of a doing a job. Joining in the work encourages teamwork and sets an example for children to follow.

Most parents struggle with getting their kids to help out on a regular basis since doing chores is usually on the bottom of a child's priority list. Listed below are some suggestions on how parents can overcome their children's resistance to pitching in:

1. Allow kids to perform a fun activity such as playing on a swing set only *after* they have completed their chores.
2. Make a game out of cleaning up. Parents can assign tasks to each child and have a race to see who finishes first.
3. Show kids the consequences of not cleaning up. Let your older children run out of clean clothes if they don't do their laundry!
4. Allow time to do chores by scheduling them into the day.
5. Praise children when they make an effort to clean up in order to help motivate them.

Finally, parents must provide encouragement when their children are struggling with learning a new task. They also need to give them an opportunity to do new chores even if they make mistakes. Remember, we are actually doing our kids a favor by requiring them to help out. As a result, they will hopefully grow up to be more socially responsible adults.

Sources:

- 1 Parlapiano, Ellen. "The Score on Chores" Child Magazine, October., 1999, pages 62-66.
- 2 Salk, Dr.Lee. Familyhood. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Publishing, 1992.
- 3 Stanley, Jenna.. "Mommy's Little Helper" Parents Magazine, May, 1999, pages 33-35.
- 4 Wyckoff, Jerry, Ph.D. and Unell, Barbara. Discipline without Shouting or Spanking. Deephaven, MN: Meadowbrook, Inc., 1984.

First published December 1999 in "The Duet", Bucks-Mont Mothers of Multiples. All rights reserved to the publication and the author.