

Children Helping at Home

In today's hectic world, working parents must organize their responsibilities and manage their time in ways similar to skilled executives. Gaining cooperation from children for helping out with family chores is part of the challenge.

Cleaning, cooking, shopping, laundry, school and community activities, church events, athletics all compete for parents' limited time. Couple this with children's tendencies for dawdling, messy play, mood swings and experimentation, and one can expect frustrations when it comes to getting children to help out at home.

First, it is best to start when the children are young, keeping in mind that the best tasks are those appropriate to the youngsters' age levels. At the toddler age, make a game out of picking up toys or setting the table. Many young children love singing familiar songs while they work. Singing can brighten everyone's day. Try singing "this is the way we make our bed..." to the tune of "Here we go round the mulberry bush...", or "I've been picking up my toys, all the livelong day..." to the tune of "I've been working on the railroad...."

Second, parents can organize the home in ways that will encourage young children to help. For example, open toy shelves and low child-size clothes racks or clothes pegs can help encourage them in these simple tasks and make cleanup easier. Also consider writing down and posting all home care tasks that are required daily, weekly and occasionally to keep your home functioning well. Share these with all the kids to help them learn what it takes to run a home. Dividing the jobs evenly and appropriately according to developmental level and skill is a great topic to discuss with family members.

Third, and perhaps the most important, is the parents' attitude about household chores. Should there be a distinct line between family time and chore time? Is working together on home chores a necessary evil before the family can have fun? A positive and patient parent can help many children develop a positive view about chores. In fact, the children may see the chores as fun! If parents can think of time spent together doing chores as family time, great strides can be made in creating harmony in the home.

Although it takes longer to complete chores with young children, consider those times as good opportunities for your child to learn from the most important teacher in their lives – you. Children can learn from their parents important lessons about cooperation, problem solving, diligence and pride in work well done. They also learn practical skills like counting, measuring, sorting, matching, reading and language development.

When you include your children in everyday tasks, you send them a strong signal – that you are interested in them and that you want and enjoy their company. By keeping home chores lighthearted and fun, you make it more likely and easier to get a little help around the house.