

Helping at Home

Contributing to the smooth running of the family can teach children:

- to value their own and other people's belongings
- to look after things and other people
- responsibility within a family
- skills for living
- independence
- self control.

Helpers need:

- a warning that it is time to change activities, eg 'Two minutes and then we have to pack up'
- time to pack up so that packing up is also 'fun'
- time as children often take longer to do a task
- time limits for when the job should be done (by dinner time, before school)
- your help to 'finish' the job
- to know what standard is expected
- someone to notice their efforts
- someone to show them how to help
- a partner rather than a sergeant
- help to make the task more fun - singing, reading, talking helps to 'move the job along'.
- thanks
- a statement of appreciation
- praise
- a share in decision making and making rules
- good role models.

Household chores

Expectations vary between families and cultures. You must decide the responsibilities your children will assume. Don't expect too much too early - but remember young children love helping. By encouraging this you are building up good habits for later on.

At about 18 months, children love to put things in other things. Make use of this instead of putting things in rubbish bins and toilets, encourage them to put toys, clothes and plastic containers in drawers or cupboards. They can have fun and begin helping. Don't be surprised if they tip everything out and want to do it all over again.

From age three to four years children will enjoy tidying up if they have a place to put away their belongings. Open shelves will help them see where things belong and makes it easier to put them things away. Children at this age like to do things 'like mum' or 'like dad' or other special people like grandparents, but are easily distracted and may forget what they are doing half way through a task.



From age five or six, children can help make sandwiches, dress themselves and are more successful at finishing jobs.

Seven, eight and nine year olds are thoughtful and understand reasons for asking them to do things. They may also give reasons why they shouldn't! Asking rather than demanding is the key.

Seven, eight and nine year olds can do most simple tasks like:

- washing and drying dishes,
- putting clothes away, hanging out clothes and
- sweeping floors.

Children enjoy your help too! A task like cleaning a bedroom is enormous for a child. You can help by making the task smaller, eg: getting them to first pick up all the animals or all the blocks. Matching and sorting is important learning. Talk with them while the job is being done. Give incentives such as time, activities, as encouragement to finish the job.

By 10, 11 and 12 years, children enjoy 'earning' money for small jobs and love the buying power money gives!

Getting children to help

A good way to enlist help from children is to start small and gradually build up as they and their confidence and abilities grow.

What jobs are appropriate will vary between families and cultures.

Including your child in part of the decision making usually means they are more likely to finish the job.

Ideas which may help include the following:

- Try to live by the rule 'Don't put it down, put it away.'
- Make a 'cleaning time' each day or each week or according to your family's needs. Knowing it is coming can help you all put up with the mess at other times.
- Have a place for dirty clothes in each bedroom or bathroom, preferably wherever the children are when taking off their clothes.
- Have everyone in the family make a list of what jobs need to be done each day or each week. Change jobs from time to time - rotate jobs that aren't popular. A roster might help.
- When possible give your children a choice of jobs to do.
- Boys and girls can do the same number of jobs.
- When children do a task, it is done. Don't do the job over again or it will make them feel bad.
- Allow children to do a job their way. It won't hurt if they make patterns with the creme cleanser before cleaning the bath.
- Give each child only as many jobs as they can handle.
- Choose times when they are happy and not busy with their own things to ask them to help. None of us like doing chores when tired or doing something fun.
- Try not to 'remind' them too much.
- Write notes to remind children about jobs. Make them silly sometimes like writing a note saying 'Help! I'm lost!' and putting it on to a jacket which has been left on the floor.
- Children are more likely to remember jobs if there is a good reason why they need to be done, eg clothes not put in the laundry don't get washed.
- Call to give a warning if jobs are to be done by a set time and you are coming home earlier than expected.
- Try hiding a surprise in the bottom of a pile of laundry or at the bottom of a box of toys to be put away.
- Don't give your children too many chores.
- Set an example by occasionally offering to help your children. For example 'Can I help you tidy your room, it looks like a lot of work today' shows that helping and caring for each other is part of a normal family.

When children do chores they are learning about consequences. For instance if their dirty clothes are not put in the dirty laundry basket they won't have anything clean to wear to school.

Source: www.community.wa.gov.au/fcs