

Managing TIME & WORK FAMILY

FACT SHEET

Getting Children to Help

Many families today do not have a stay-at-home parent. Because of this, and because children need the training and responsibility of doing household chores, it is important that all family members help with the work at home.

Children often resist doing work around the house because they do not agree about what is fair. Parents may not give the children chores because it is easier to do the job themselves.

Today's families need to work together so that all family members share in the household management responsibilities.

The Case for Family Chores

Work, family activities, personal interests and community responsibilities keep families twice as busy as they used to be. In order to keep a home running smoothly, all family members should share the responsibilities. Also, a parent should consider the benefits children receive from working around the house.

Doing family chores helps children:

- Increase their ability to be responsible.
- Build self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Learn necessary life skills that will help them when they have their own homes.
- Learn to prioritize, organize and use their time wisely.

One of the primary goals of parenting is to teach our children to be responsible, confident, happy and independent adults.

Nine Steps for Getting Children to Assume Responsibilities at Home

There is no absolutely reliable method to get children to help around the house. However, there are suggestions that may *motivate* children to do household chores.

Here are nine steps that may help you develop a system of shared, home-management responsibilities.

Step 1: Initiate a family discussion.

- Find out from the children which jobs they think need to be done and which ones they like or dislike.
- Make a list of everyone's ideas.
 - Be as specific as possible. For example, rather than listing, "clean bedroom," write down individual tasks: "make bed," "pick up toys," "place dirty clothes in hamper," etc.

- Decide which jobs need to be done daily, weekly or monthly. If some tasks are being done more than necessary, decide how to handle these jobs in the future.

Step 2: Decide who will do what jobs.

- Review who is currently responsible for household chores. Is one family member doing more than the others? Is there a better way to divide the chores?
- Each family member can be responsible for his or her own room, clothes, etc. Other jobs can be divided.
- Let everyone develop a fair system of assigning tasks. For example, write tasks on colored paper—blue for daily tasks and yellow for weekly tasks. Have each family member choose one color, or alternate weeks or days for particular tasks.
- Try not to assign disliked tasks to the same family member any more often than necessary.
- Do not assign a task to one child simply because that child does a better job than his or her siblings. Remember, practice makes perfect for the others.
- Avoid dividing jobs into male and female tasks. Everyone needs to learn a variety of household-management skills.

Step 3: Teach children the necessary skills.

It is important to have children develop the skills necessary to complete their chores.

- Show each child how to do each job.
- Make sure he or she knows how to operate equipment safely.
- Work with your child until he or she can do it well.
- Observe the child until the job is completed.
- Make any necessary corrections.
- Offer compliments generously.
- Show how to do something differently, only if necessary.

Step 4. Agree on acceptable standards & work quality.

Everyone has different ideas about what constitutes a “clean” room.

- Be specific when setting up chores so that everyone understands what is expected.
- Discuss and reach an agreement on standards with your child.
 - Allow your child to have input.
 - Lower your standard of cleanliness, if necessary.

Step 5: Create a user-friendly home.

Teach your children how to be organized.

- Show them how to reduce work by putting things away—not down. It is easier to hang up a jacket as soon as its removed, rather than pick it up off the floor and put it away later.
- Teach them to combine tasks. For example, children can set the table for breakfast while putting away the supper dishes.
- Teach your children about the usefulness of clocks, calendars and lists. Help them organize their time by showing them how to make a “to-do” list.
- Provide functional, easy-to-use equipment.
- Decide how you can make each room in your house more manageable and functional. An organized house creates an atmosphere in which everyone can do their household chores without a fuss.

Step 6: Set a deadline for the work to be done.

After you and your children have discussed the division of responsibilities, it is important to talk about a chore deadline. To help your children learn how to manage chores, encourage them to make reasonable suggestions.

- Deadlines should be agreeable to both you and your children.
- Be fair and reasonable. Once a schedule is set, do not vary it. You may end up arguing with your children if they always ask to put off the chores in order to play outside, etc.

Step 7: Decide on the rewards for a job done well, and the consequences of not completing tasks.

A family meeting to talk specifically about the responsibilities, and the consequences of not fulfilling them, may work for your family. The key is to discuss this before a problem occurs, and everyone knows what to expect. It is important to agree upon the consequences in advance and consistently apply them.

Step 8: Be a good role model.

One mother who is particularly successful at getting her children to help around the house shared this tip, “Children will do what they are trained to do. The secret is you, the parent. If you expect your child to make his or her bed, be certain that your bed is made too.”

Step 9: Make sure everyone has time for fun and enjoyment, and time to pursue their own interests.

The reason for sharing household tasks is to give the family more time together, and to have more time for accomplishing individual goals. Make sure that chores do not become drudgery.

Many parents think it is easier to do the work themselves rather than train children to share the responsibilities. It does require a time investment to train and discuss what is expected.

Some children will try to make their parents feel guilty when they are asked to share in the household responsibilities. Remember, you are doing yourself and your children a disservice when you do all of the housework!

Parents need to be willing to delegate, train, follow through and, above all, set a good example for their children.

Conclusion

Who wants to do all the household work themselves?

The parents don't, and the children certainly don't.

Because everyone is busy, all family members need to be trained and given responsibility for work in the home. It makes sense to share household-management responsibilities.

To be successful in working together, you should follow the nine steps which were previously discussed. With a little luck, and the cooperation of all family members, you too can reap the rewards by having a neat and tidy home.

Adapted from:

Johnson, Diane E. "Getting Kids to Help around the House,"
Balancing Work and Family State Notebook. Columbus, Ohio:
The Ohio State University Cooperative Extension Service.

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, Manhattan, Kansas

MF-2256

December 1997

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating, Richard D. Wootton, Associate Director.

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File Code: Family Resource Management—4

CS 12/97—150