

Chores

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What's Ahead:

- Deciding What to Delegate
- Assigning Chores and Keeping Track
- Teaching the Chore
- Getting It Done
- Sticking With It

Children have many “jobs” during childhood—academic studies, social skills, physical achievements, and good, hard play. Learning responsibility through chores needn't be a large part of their day, but what they will gain through being a contributing member of the family is a sense of dedication and self-worth that will last a lifetime.

Deciding What to Delegate

- Determine what the family chores are. Make a list of tasks to be done daily (making, bed, clearing table, washing dishes) and another list of those done weekly (vacuuming, dusting, etc.).
- Consider your children's capabilities:
Ages three to five. At this age children are capable of one-step tasks (wash carrots; put blocks in bin) with a parent present.
Ages five to nine. School-age children can take responsibility for chores such as making their beds, but they will be more successful at other chores if you are nearby. Assign tasks that take ten minutes or less, or break a big chore down into ten-minute chunks.
Age ten and older. This age group is capable of working alone to perform more complex tasks, such as helping with siblings or doing an errand for you. Give specific instructions, and check on them occasionally.
- Schedule a family conference, and let the children voice an opinion on chores they would like to do. Your son may hate cleaning but not mind helping with meal preparation, and a positive attitude will increase the likelihood of success.
- Delegate according to preference and ability. Keep in mind that the most successful chores are "real" chores the ones where the children see a benefit: If I scrape carrots, we eat them. The least successful are those with a remote benefit: Dusting may make a difference to you, but not to most children. "

Assigning Chores and Keeping Track

Job charts and check-off methods provide an organized system for assigning what must get done.

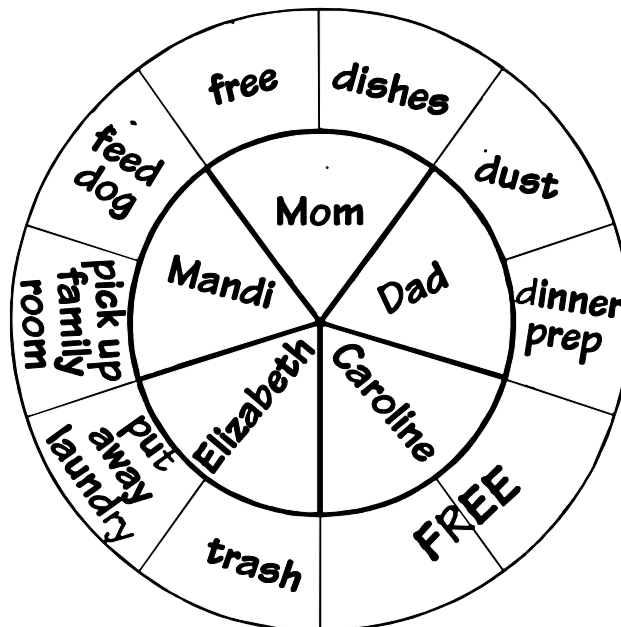
Permanent Schedule

If you anticipate that jobs will vary only with the day of the week, here is a good chart for your family:

Name	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Mom	Dishes	Trash	Dishes	Trash	Dishes	Trash	Dishes
Dad	Trash	Dishes	Trash	Dishes	Trash	Dishes	Trash
Julia	Feed Dog	Feed Dog	Feed Dog	Feed Dog	Feed Dog	Feed Dog	Feed Dog
Harrison	Toy Pickup	Table	Toy Pickup	Table	Toy Pickup	Toy Pickup	FREE
Joy	Table	Toy Pickup	Table	Toy Pickup	Table	Table	FREE

Job Wheel

Make a job wheel by cutting out two circles, one larger than the other. On the larger circle, write the chores; on the smaller one, note the names of all family members. Put the two circles together using a brad (available at stationery stores). Every day the smaller dial is moved one position to the right, making each family member responsible for new tasks.



Job Drawing

Write chores on separate slips of paper that are put in a bowl. (With this method, chores specific to the week can also be listed: "Buy get-well card," or "Wrap Grandma's present.") Once a week, family members draw to see what chores they have to do that week. This system works best when your children are old enough to perform a variety of tasks.

Job Pockets

On slips of paper, write family chores. On envelopes, write the names of family members. {Post these on a bulletin board or poster board.) These "pockets" will hold each person's daily assignments. Jobs can be requested, drawn, or assigned. As each task is completed a slip can be removed, giving you a quick way to check on whether certain tasks have been accomplished.

Teaching the Chore

Explain chores thoroughly.

Step one: Break the chore down. A chore such as "wiping the kitchen counter" sounds simple, but you'll quickly learn otherwise when you watch a typical eight-year-old grab a soaking sponge from the sink, drip water across the floor, swipe the sponge across the counter, pushing crumbs onto the floor and leaving water in the sponge's wake. Break *any* chore down into steps. Wiping a counter might involve: remove dishes; wring sponge out over sink; use sponge to brush crumbs neatly into cupped hand held at edge of counter; dump handful of crumbs into trash.

Step two: Demonstrate the chore exactly the way you want it done--down to the last detail. Show children how to bag garbage *and* how to use the twist-tie.

Step three: Supervise the chore, making helpful but non-critical comments: "Good job, but next time, try sweeping the leaves into the bushes instead of the driveway."

Step four: Increase responsibility. Let them do the chore "lien you're not around, or add one new step. (Bring in the milk and eggs from the milk box *and* put the eggs into the egg container in the refrigerator.)

Step five: Praise them regularly and often.

- If equipment is used in a chore, make certain it's child-appropriate and easy to use.
- Many chores can be done in just a few minutes. Show them how it can take five minutes or less to put books away, set the dinner table, wipe the bathroom sink, put folded laundry in the drawer, address a birthday card, rewind a rented videotape, etc.
- Don't redo a chore. This communicates a lack of trust and gives the child the feeling that his efforts are ineffectual.

"CLEAN YOUR ROOM!"

"Clean your room!" is one of the most frequently demanded chores by parents, but consider this from a child's standpoint. *Exactly* what does that mean? They need to be shown what the family standards are in the room-cleaning business.

- Start working with them when they are preschoolers, demonstrating how books are to be put back on the shelf; how only blocks go in the block bin, how dress-ups go in the basket.
- Point out what is being accomplished and why. "If we put your action figures away, you'll know where to find them tomorrow."
- Instead of saying: "Clean your room," be specific: "Would you please put your laundry in the hamper and make your bed."
- Has the mess in your child's room become overwhelming? Maybe your child is overwhelmed, too. Even a teen may need you to come in to help outline what needs to be done.

Getting It Done

- Give young children transition time. "In a few minutes we're going to have to pick-up."
- Offer a limited range of choices: "Would you like to put away the puzzles or the stuffed animals first?"
- Set up a "star" system. Give a star for every day that all chores are completed, with a trip out for ice cream when seven stars are earned.
- Offer incentives. If your daughter wants to go to the playground, promise that you'll go, "after you've finished your chores."
- Make chores fun. For little ones:
 - Clean up to music.
 - Pick up toys around the house by giving your child a wagon, cart, or basket, and sending her on a "toy hunt."
 - Race each other: "I can put away the books faster than you can put away the blocks."
 - Let them be the parent; they can assign a task to you and choose one for themselves.
 - Play a guessing game such as What's Out of Place? You might take a photograph of your child's room when it looks terrific. Mount or frame it. Then your child can examine the photo and compare it with "real life," noting what areas need picking up.

- Pretend. As a Ninja Turtle, your son could use his ingenuity to locate stray toys throughout the house.
- With older children:
 - Be respectful of their other activities. Don't schedule chores during their homework time, or expect them to undertake a major task just before they're going out.
 - Set a deadline. One working mother leaves "chore" cards for her young teens, and they know they are to be finished before she gets home from work.

Sticking With It

After beginning to do a chore, children quickly recognize a chore for what it is--WORK! Here's what to do when enthusiasm begins to wane:

- Let your children know that, as family members, they are accountable for chores. They should learn: "You don't have to like it; you just have to do it."
- Older children may ask for a reprieve or postponement. If it is negotiable, agree on a time when it must be completed, and hold them to it.
- Pay? If you want to, but only for chores above and beyond what other family members are contributing.
Teach consequences, linking them as closely as possible to what was left undone. If your child fails to rake the leaves and you have to do it, then you may not have the time to take him to the video store on Saturday. (A child should be warned of the possible penalty.)

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