

GIVING CHILDREN CHORES AT HOME

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An Expository Essay: Giving Children Chores at Home

As children grow and develop, they form many lifelong habits. In addition, they develop a number of skills, both socially and cognitively. They learn at school and they learn in play. They also learn at home. Most people would agree that one of the most important vehicles for developing skills at home is through the assignment of household chores.

Household chores for children typically involve making beds, putting toys and clothes away, feeding the family pet, sweeping the floor, taking out the trash, washing dishes, and so forth. However, chores vary depending on a number of factors, including the various needs of the family. What kinds of household chores to which children are assigned is often based on the personal characteristics of the child, the social-environmental factors involving family values and family composition, and the kinds of household tasks that must be completed¹. When establishing chores, the parents should make certain that expectations are realistic². Is the child capable of completing the chore and to what standards? To avoid possible misunderstanding, hurt feelings, or resentment, parents should talk with and listen to their children to ensure that their children see a fair and equitable distribution of family household chores and how contributions are viewed³.

Whatever the family needs, completing household chores allows children to develop skills desirable for independent living later in life. These skills include participating with family members socially and

¹ Dunn, L. (2004). Validation of the chores: A measure of school-aged children's participation in household tasks. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 11(1), 179-190.

² LaCaze, D., & Kirylo, J. D. (2012). Family connections: Addressing behavior issues: Practical tips for parents. *Childhood Education*, 88(1), 57-58. doi: 10.1080/00094056.2012.643728

³ Ibid.

collaboratively. For example, children must learn to interact with family members appropriately in order to complete tasks, which often include working collaboratively with another family member. In addition, completing chores provides opportunity for children to develop time-management skills, decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, and self-monitoring skills. Furthermore, empirical evidence indicates that children who participate in completing household chores are able to exercise better self-control, demonstrate positive social behaviors, and have a less likelihood of developing behavioral problems⁴. The skills developed in completing household chores extend into lifetime healthy habits.

Another important point to keep in mind is that children often need guidance in staying on task and remembering to complete their chores. A key to helping children complete chores on a daily or weekly basis is having a consistent routine in place. Doing so helps children to develop habits and understand expectations. Also, because children develop their thinking from the concrete to the abstract, the use of visuals such as recording the completion of their tasks on a chart is useful in their perceptions of accomplishments. Children should learn to record their own accomplishments. They can do this with checks or with stickers, for example. Children develop a satisfaction of seeing what they have accomplished, which may lead to their development later of intrinsic motivation to cultivate a lifetime of healthy habits⁵.

Knowing that they are contributing in a meaningful and important manner to the smooth running of the household can provide a powerful sense of self-perception. Parents should strive to acknowledge their children's contributions.

⁴ Dunn, L. (2004). Validation of the chores: A measure of school-aged children's participation in household tasks. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 11(1), 179-190.

⁵ Cline, F. W., & Fay, J. (1990). *Parenting with love and logic: Teaching children responsibility*. Colorado Springs, CO: Pinion Press.

They can reward their children's completion of chores with positive reinforcement, such as giving a compliment for a job well-done, a pat on the back or a hug⁶. Again, this can lead to the child's sense of intrinsic motivation and personal satisfaction.

⁶ Ricker, A., Calmes, R. E., & Sneyd, L. W. (2006). How happy families happen: Six steps to bringing emotional and spiritual health into your home. Center City, MN: Hazelden.

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