

Chore wars



THREE STEPS TO HELP KIDS LEARN TO PITCH IN AND DO CHORES...WITHOUT BICKERING!

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From our guest contributor, Michele Borba.

Let's face it, sometimes it's just easier to put chores low on the priority list. There's so much more to do, right? But there's a compelling reason why you should get your kids to roll up their sleeves and get involved. Research shows just how important it is to involve our kids in those household chores. Those household tasks such as making your bed, taking out the trash, setting the table, raking leaves actually help kids learn crucial skills they need to take care of themselves, develop responsibility, empathy, cooperation and self-reliance, as well as become better-adjusted young adults.

So get those kids off the couch and let the chores begin! Here are the three steps to help kids learn to pitch in and do chores...without bickering!

STEP 1. Use the Right Strategies to Boost Chore Success

- **Start early:** The earlier you expect your kids to take an active role helping around the house, the easier you'll

find it is to get them to lend a hand. Even kids as young as three years old can help out. Though it's never too late for basic training, it's sure easier to begin earlier.

- **Announce expectations:** If you want your kid to be helpful and a contributing family member, then just plain expect him to help out and willingly lend a hand. Hold a family meeting and announce your new expectations. Expect groans and moans. So be it!
- **Specify assignments:** There are many ways to assign chores, so find the solution that works for your family and then stick to it. Each week hold a brief meeting to review assignments. Here are different approaches to chore assignments:
 - Assign three simple daily chores and one more time consuming weekly chore
 - Assign one easier chore (emptying trash) and one harder one (washing dishes)
 - Your child is responsible for her personal possessions (clothing, toys, bedroom) and one household duty as a contributing family member
 - Your child chooses one chore he enjoys; you assign the other task
 - Your child chooses the one task she would like to learn to do that week
- **Decide if you'll give an allowances and chores:** As to the "pay or not pay" concept for doing chores: I've dramatically changed my views. I used to pay my kids for doing their chores as part of a weekly allowance. After reviewing a lot of the new research (I just did a TODAY show segment on this one last week), I say chores and allowances should be not tied together. Use your own judgment. But the latest view—and mine—is that kids should be given a weekly allowance to learn money management skills and stick to a budget. Kids also

should be just expected to do chores and lend a hand in the house without pay. They need to realize they are part of a home and that cooperating and helping out is just something you all do together. Wherever you fit on the “allowance philosophy,” do be consistent.

- **Set deadlines:** Chores should have specific time limits (“by bedtime” or “before Saturday”) instead of saying they must be done immediately. Special situations birthdays, illnesses, or an important upcoming test deserve a reprieve.
- **Make chores matter:** Give jobs where kids can feel they are contributing to your family. Teach tasks to tweens that will help them handle life on their own in just a few years.
- **Use reminders:** Chore charts that show job assignment and completion dates are helpful. Nonreaders can “read” their chores responsibilities with pictures or photographs. Those charts also reduce having to give reminders.
- **Chunk tasks:** Break down each task into smaller more manageable parts until your child knows what to do on her own. Be explicit about what you expect.

STEP 2: Assign the Right Chore for the Right Age

A big secret to ending chore wars is to find the right match for your child. Don’t forget to ask your son or daughter what task they would like to learn how to do to lend a hand. Here are appropriate household chores age by age, but use your instinct. Look around your house...what needs attending to that your kids could do?

Chores for Toddlers: It’s never too early to begin, but let’s be realistic about what this age can do. Do not expect a toddler to do any “chore” on his own and if they do it’s no more than a minute or two. The point at this age is just to

model you and pretend to help. And you can gently encourage his helping spirit with your praise... just don't ever expect them to go solo. This is only for fun and to set the stage. Here's how:

- **Do dress up!** Toddlers love to help and learn best by copying and working next to you. So purchase a pint-size broom, rake, or vacuum (that looks like Mommy's). Your little one can grab his broom and copy you.
- **Set out a special box, bin or basket for your toddler to help you put her toys away.** She won't do this alone...and don't expect her to...but usually loves to help you do the task (for a few seconds anyway). Teddy bear can help as well.

Chores For Preschoolers: The important tip for this age is if you expect this age to do chores first alone, they are likely to give up in frustration. So if you want your preschooler to succeed (or really any age), first show them exactly how to do the task so they succeed. Keep the activity fun and very short. Know that they probably will still need your guidance. This is the age that loves to have "real grown up" items placed in their hands. (Make sure they are safe!) Here are a few appropriate chores:

- **Set and clear the table and fold napkins:** Be on the lookout for placemats that provide inked-in outlines of a fork, knife, spoon and plate. Some moms make them by drawing utensil outlines using permanent black marking pens on construction paper and then covering them with clear laminating paper.
- **Sponge off tables and counters:** Hand your kid a damp sponge and a squirt bottle filled with water and let him go to town cleaning away. Beware: Watch out for giving kids cleaning solutions. The AAP issued a warning last month that many kids are ending up in emergency rooms from inhaling or swallowing those cleaning agents. Fill the bottle with water!

- **Pick up toys:** Provide a box, basket, or bin for your child to put away her toys
- **Recycling:** She can stack magazines and papers (do specify exactly where you want items placed) and empty small wastebaskets.
- **Gardening:** Fill a water can and designate certain plants that should be watered.

Chores for School-Age Kids: School-age kids are ready to help out in the household as well as some simple yard work. Go through each new chore step by step with your child so that she clearly knows how to do it. Then observe her doing it at least once to make sure she can handle it. Gradually increase your expectations based on success. For instance, if you ask your child to set the table, start with requiring only a placemat and napkin. Next add the knife, fork and spoon. Then add the glasses. Be sure any dishes are plastic. Remember, this is the age in which homework starts to mount. Keep that in mind by requiring only a shorter task during schooldays and a slightly longer task on the weekends.

- **Routine household chores:** Set and clear table, put dishes in dishwasher, put clean ones away, vacuum, dust, sweep.
- **Laundry:** Gradually increase the repertoire until your child can do the majority alone. Start with giving each child a hamper to place dirty laundry. Next, bring the hamper to the laundry room. Then sort the whites and colors. Then start the washing machine, etc.
- **Meals:** Make their lunch and be responsible for cooking one simple part of evening meal which does not have to involve a stove. It could be spooning the ice cream into plastic dishes or tossing the salad.
- **Pet care:** Feeding, taking the dog on a walk, brushing, bathing, cleaning out cage or just petting and playing with the animal. (Don't let a younger child be responsible for an animal—for the animal's sake! But do

find ways to involve your child in the pet's care if that pet "belongs" to your child).

- **Gardening:** Simple weeding in one area, watering plants, raking leaves, mowing the lawn, sweeping the patio.
- **Personal bedrooms:** They should slowly become their soul responsibility including dusting, making the bed and changing sheets. The easiest way to have kids make their own bed is just buy a big comfortable to pull up.

Chores for Preteens and Teens: In a few short years this same kid is probably will be living on her own. So think of assigning chores to help prepare your son or daughter for independent living. Ask her what tasks she needs to learn before she goes off to live in that dorm or apartment. In addition to the previous tasks, here are items to consider:

- **Cooking:** Learning a few basic cooking recipes to cook alone
- **Laundry:** Completely doing their own laundry
- **Bathroom:** Cleaning their shower, toilet, tub (My kids' roommates have thanked me)
- **Car care:** When she gets that license make her responsible for maintaining car appearance washing exterior, cleaning windows, filling it with gas, even taking in for service. Make sure your show your daughter how to change a tire and check the oil gauge..for a just in case moments!

STEP 3: Don't Forget to Acknowledge Success

- **Watch your tone:** A survey found that one-quarter of all responding parents admitted that they constantly nagged their kids about cleaning their room. Stop nagging!
- **Attach consequences for incompletes:** Set suitable repercussions for uncompleted tasks such as: If she doesn't put his dirty clothes in the hamper, she foregoes clean clothes and wait until the next wash cycle. Never pay kids for work that isn't completed. Or

if he doesn't rake the leaves, have someone else do the task, but your kid pays for it with his allowance.

- **Acknowledge efforts:** Don't forget to praise your kids for jobs that are done well and on time.

It's never too early for your child to help out with the household chores. (Okay, do wait until your child is at least out of diapers!) But the fact is the sooner you begin assigning chores, the easier it is to nurture your child's responsibility muscle. Just do remember to choose tasks that match your child's abilities, show your child exactly what you expect, and finally stand back. And one more thing: "Never do any task for your child that she can do alone."