



Wee Learn

Wee Mentors
(6+ years):
The Ultimate Guide
To Chores



It's a short list: Feed the cat, throw a load in the washer and set the table for dinner, which should take no more than 10 minutes after school. But you come home from work to find a hungry cat, an empty washer, a bare table — and your kid engrossed in a computer game. Only when you insist that he set the table *right* now does he head for the kitchen, grumbling about why he must do all the work.

Why is it so difficult to get kids to help around the house? We nag, cajole and threaten. We post charts and withhold allowance. We give up and do it ourselves. Is it worth the hassle? Do kids really gain that much by helping with yard work or cleaning their rooms? Shouldn't they be concentrating on their homework and their wrist shot?

Why chores are important. Turns out chores are important. In 2002, University of Minnesota professor of family education Marty Rossmann examined interviews with 84 kids, beginning at age three or four until their mid-20s. She found that involvement in household tasks from a young age was the greatest predictor of adult success — success being defined as completing an education, getting started on a career path, having good relationships with family and friends, and not engaging in destructive behaviour like drug abuse.

When kids participate in household tasks, they learn co-operation, responsibility and pride of ownership. A child who has helped clean the family room may be more likely to carry his dirty popcorn bowl to the kitchen. "Kids need responsibilities, large and small, that contribute to the well-being of the family," says Liz Larsen, family services coordinator at Edmonton's Kara Family Resources Centre. "Responsible parents raise irresponsible children," says Schäfer. "Your kids will only take responsibility when you abandon it." Be mindful that you can't do this all at once.

Action plan. Good reasons notwithstanding, motivating your kids to help is not always easy. Jane MacLeod has heard every excuse in the book: *Why do I have to do it? He didn't do anything! I always have to do it!* "I think it's a long process. It takes a lot of asking and a lot of repetition," says MacLeod.

Start 'em young. Ideally, kids should be involved in simple chores from age three or four, says Larsen. Younger children are always asking, "Can I help?" Try to say yes, even though it may slow you down. A preschooler can pull clothes from the dryer, put newspapers in the recycling box or tear up lettuce for the salad.

Forgo efficiency. It takes patience and a willingness to relax your standards, says Larsen. "A little person may not fold that washcloth corner to corner, but they've folded it nonetheless — and we can praise the effort, if not the outcome. If we take over, we're teaching kids that they can't even accomplish small tasks."

Put your child's talents to work. Not all chores have to be drudgery. A kid who enjoys electronics might like to set up your new cellphone.

Stop nagging. If you're yelling and barking a lot, it may help to step back and think about logical consequences, say our experts: You've asked your son to set the table for dinner, but it isn't done. You might say, "I can't serve dinner because there are no plates on the table."





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Work together. Pretty much any task is more fun when done as a team. Just keep the tone positive, says Larsen. You can high-five each other when the lawn is raked, put on some great music and do the vacuuming, or set a timer and get everyone to pick up and put away for 20 minutes.

Whistle while you work. Do you hate housework? Chances are your kids will too. Rather than grumbling about the laundry pile, throw the clothes on the bed and invite your kids to a folding party.

Have a flexible plan. How household chores are shared will depend on your circumstances and the ages of your kids. If, for instance, you're returning to work after several years at home, you may have to call a family meeting and discuss who might be able to start dinner after school or walk the dog.

"What's important is the process," says Schäfer. "You can't impose something on your kids and then expect them to happily follow it. You'll get the best buy-in by asking how it could look."

Charts and rewards. For some kids, a little motivation can be found in affixing a sticker to a chore chart. (If you want to try one, there are tons on the Internet. Just do a Google search.) Should you give money for chores? The jury is out. Schäfer says there's research to show that rewards are demotivating. In her view, children should receive an allowance to help them learn money management skills, not to motivate them to work. You run the risk of hearing, "What will you pay me for it?" when you ask your kid to put away his laundry, she argues.

Tying chores to allowance may depend on your circumstances, your family's values, as well as your child's temperament — a kid who doesn't desire a lot of things, for example, may not be motivated by money.

However you decide to tackle the issue of chores, consider this from Larsen: "What children become starts at home. We have to ask ourselves what we value, and then make a commitment to nurturing that."

Chores age-by-age

3–5 years

- make bed
- ice cupcakes, butter bread
- put away books and toys
- put apple peels in kitchen compost
- pour kibble in dog's dish

6–9 years

- change sheets, put dirty sheets in hamper
- begin to read recipes, help with food preparation
- carry lunch money and notes to school
- get up with alarm clock
- take out compost



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10-12 years

- pack suitcase
- make a salad
- borrow and return library books
- vacuum, mop, dust
- clean bathroom
- weed garden

13-14 years

- maintain bicycle
- turn compost
- prepare a meal
- do laundry
- help redecorate a bedroom

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