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How Can I Teach My Children To Do Chores?

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A weekly question/answer column

How Can I Teach My Children To Do Chores?

Tom Lee answers:*

Having children help with chores isn't always the fastest way to get the job done, or the best way to get the desired results, but it is the only way children will learn to work. It is important for children to know that working and being happy at the same time are vital ingredients for a successful life. Consider these tips as you teach them.

- **Teach by example.** Children will learn a task best when parents work with them and show the steps involved. Telling doesn't equal teaching. Also use the time together to strengthen relationships, and don't expect perfect performance of the task at first.
- **Assign age-appropriate tasks.** Young children are eager to help and it is a great time to begin teaching work habits. Preschoolers can put away toys, throw dirty clothes in the hamper, empty the wastebaskets, or help clear the table. Young children also enjoy having a squirt bottle and rag to clean fingerprints off appliances, the TV screen, or door jams. As children get older, they can dust, help with the laundry, vacuum, or do the dishes. Children ages 8 to 10 can learn to prepare some foods, and older children can be put in charge of dinner one night a week. Everybody can carry in the groceries or pick up clutter.
- **Involve children.** Hold a family meeting to discuss the best way for chores to be divided. For example, write all the chores that need to be done on slips of paper, put them in a chore bottle and have family members draw the slips. Decide in advance if trading will be allowed. Or, use a job chart with spaces for children to check off their successfully completed tasks. Whatever the method, children will be more interested in doing their share if they have some say in what their jobs will be. Also involve children in choosing a reward for the family when chores are done on time.
- **Use praise.** Parents can sometimes become overly critical in their desire to have children learn to do things well. When parents do the job over, children may not want to do the job again. Try to be positive so children feel that their contributions are important and appreciated.

* Tom Lee is Utah State University Extension Family and Human Development Specialist