

Mother's Little Helper

Age-Appropriate Chores

At about three, it's likely our little darlings can work the remote (all four of them probably) and have learned that Google is the answer to their 'Why?' questions. So we know they are smart, but can our little prodigies pull the blanket up on their bed? How about put their toys away in a basket or feed the dog? If you haven't got them started on helping out around the house, you will want to start soon. Because in this age of 'helicopter parenting', it's becoming more and more important for our children to learn to do things on their own to encourage independence and confidence.

We came across an important study by Marty Rossman at the University of Minnesota which found that involvement in household chores from a young age, by at least age 6 or 7, is the greatest predictor of adult success (defined as completing education, getting started with a career, maintaining strong relationships with family and friends and avoiding destructive behaviours such as drinking and drug use). The interesting part? Starting with chores once they are teens does not result in the same positive results as they tend to be resentful of the work, not proud of their contributions as they are when they start younger.

But what's age appropriate? After all we don't want little Jack and Jill breaking the best crystal or getting so frustrated that they never want to help again. To get started, we've compiled a list of age-appropriate chores. So hold a family meeting, find out which ones the kids want to take on (usually one per year is enough i.e. two chores for two year old) and post the list up somewhere so everyone can be reminded of their responsibilities. Help the kids choose ones they will be able to succeed with and they will be beaming with pride (as will you).

Ages 2–3

- Help make the bed (at least straighten the covers)
- Pick up toys and books and put them in bins or piles
- Put laundry in the hamper and/or take to the laundry room
- Help feed pets
- Help straighten pillows
- Bring in newspaper
- Dust (try giving them a Swiffer sheet or putting socks on their hands)

Ages 4–5

In addition to the above,

- Clear and set the table
- Help preparing food e.g. buttering bread, ripping washed lettuce
- Carrying and putting away groceries
- Empty cutlery from dishwasher
- Help water plants (indoors and out)

Ages 6–9

In addition to the above,

- Take care of the family pet
- Vacuum
- Change bed sheets (at least remove dirty ones)
- Gather up garbage from around the house and take out
- Put away laundry and some basic laundry folding
- Empty dishwasher

Ages 9–12

In addition to the above,

- Help with outdoor chores such as raking leaves, shoveling snow, washing the car or weeding
- Wash dishes (after suitable training)
- Clean the bathroom (definitely something to look forward to!)
- Sort clothes and operate the washer and dryer
- Help with packing for trips
- Make a salad

Age 13 and up

In addition to the above,

- Clean out refrigerator
- 'Own' the complete laundry program
- Prepare simple meals (including grocery lists)
- 'Own' outdoor chores such as raking leaves, mowing lawn and shoveling snow
- Assist with looking after younger siblings

So prepare to relinquish a little control around the house (they might not make hospital corners on the bed just yet) and remember these wise words of advice: "Never do anything for your kids they can do for themselves".

Good help might be closer than you think.