

helping hands

By Jo Apperley*

We all want our children to be hard-working and helpful, so what are the ages and stages to introduce these concepts to our children?

under-5s

chores

Can start as young as age 2. A great one is sorting out the household washing pile. Put the clean washing in a pile and teach your child how to sort it into piles: Mum's clothes, Dad's clothes, her clothes, sister's clothes, etc. Encourage them to use the clothes basket to carry/push the clean clothes into the appropriate rooms. From age 3, they can start to lay the table, with supervision. This sorting helps with early maths skills.

tidying up

Before leaving someone's house, it's polite to encourage them to help tidy up some of the mess they have inevitably made (this applies to children of all ages). With tots,

role-modelling is crucial, as is making a game of it: "Can you put all those bricks away before I come back?"

sharing

This is always a tricky one but it is so important. One effective way to encourage sharing is when they are busy at home playing on their own, join in and ask for a turn of their toy. Play with it/them for a few minutes and then hand it back. If they are playing with a sibling or friend, then supervise a time frame (only a few minutes, reminding both the children they will 'share' in a minute) and once time is up, encourage the children to swap the toy over. This will help your children to understand they will get a turn if they wait patiently.

helping others

This is one we often forget with our young children but is something they can do very easily and well. Helping you to get ready to go out, for example: whilst you are busy getting ready, ask them to collect other easy things and put them by the front door, such as shoes, keys, bags, etc. This will also help your child to learn to listen and follow instructions.

Remember: asking our tots to do things for us and others shouldn't be a big deal, so don't feel obligated to over-praise when they have done something for you. Just a simple, "That was such a help because now we are ready to go" is enough.



5-to 8-year-olds

chores

Chores for children of this age can become more complex and frequent. For example, loading and emptying the dishwasher has a lot of problem-solving issues for kids to think about: knowing when it is ready to be emptied, where things go, putting things in a 'good' position for washing, knowing when it is full and ready to be turned on. With some training and guidance, children can learn to do it effectively. Long term, it helps with their spatial awareness and problem solving. They can also help wash the car, sort the recycling and help with weeding in the garden.

school preparation

A 5-year-old is capable of making sure they have their school bag, school shoes and school hat by the front door. A 6-year-old is capable of doing this plus organising their own drink bottle, and with the odd reminder, organising their library books or swimming things. 7- or 8-year-olds can do this, plus start to pack their own lunches and snack boxes (either the night before or in the morning). All school-aged children can be expected to empty their school bags and put their lunchboxes on the kitchen bench.

helping and thinking of others

Simply ask your child: Who did you help today? This encourages them to think of their teachers and peers and how they may have helped them. If your child is consistently drawing a blank and can't think of anything to do to help, you could suggest they hold the door open and let people through who are carrying something; include someone in their game who looks sad; pick up something that has fallen on the floor; or help get a sibling organised for you. This will encourage them to be proactive and increase your child's sense of purpose and self-worth.



9-to 12-year-olds

By this age, your child should be a regular contributor to family life, in that they do their fair share of chores and be a willing participant in maintaining a clean and tidy household. Older children can start to do more physical tasks or ones with a greater degree of responsibility, such as cleaning bathrooms, hanging out washing on the clothesline, washing the dog, vacuuming and mopping, and changing sheets on the beds. There are also outdoor chores that older kids can help

with, such as weeding, trimming branches, painting, hammering, fixing broken things, etc.

Children need to learn that being part of a family means pulling your weight, and if children are brought up to believe that chores are not something they have to do, then it will be so much harder for them once they are young adults, having to fend for themselves in a flatting or travelling situation, for example.

No child should grow up expecting their parents to do everything for them, especially as this expectation can also easily extend into other areas of a child's life where they expect everyone else (teachers, coaches, friends) to do things for them. Teaching your child self-sufficiency, independence, responsibility and altruism (doing good things without expecting something in return) are some of the best things you can instill in your child.



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