

# Developing a Responsible Child



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**Being responsible is something that develops over time and it sure won't happen without 'parental intervention'. Here's what can be expected of a child at different ages, as well as a few tips to help with you on your way:**

A young child's willingness to help with everyday things may initially seem to be more of a nuisance than a help, but there is really no better way to teach a child to be responsible. Your 4 year old might be very interested in "washing" the dishes and you will be wise to allow him to help; even if it means that you will spend even more time on checking the dishes afterwards and washing it properly. Better enjoy and reward his enthusiasm while it lasts!

The fact of the matter is, at the age of seven or eight, when he will probably be able to wash the dishes properly, he will no longer see it as fun and games. If you wait to involve him until then, you can just as well forget about it!

The best way to instill a positive attitude in a child towards chores is to reward him for doing his chores by inviting him to do chores with you. This will not only make doing chores more fun but will also create a learning experience as you will be able to give him feedback and encouragement throughout the process.

It is important to choose appropriate chores for your child to do and to help him to do it obediently and with respect. Also remember that it is natural for an older child to be less excited about doing chores as chores usually interrupt free time and other "more fun" activities. So accept that your child to not always be too happy or cheerful about it, but try to make it easier for him by giving him age-appropriate chores to do, rewarding him for doing the chores and generally deal with the issue gracefully,

## Reasonable chores for different age groups:

Remember to limit criticism and rather focus on what your child is doing right.

You may want to look at last month's newsletter on how to criticize constructively!

Here's a list based on information sourced from an article by Judith M. Creighton, Ph.D:

### 18-24 months

- Putting dirty laundry in the hamper
- Bringing shoes to be put on
- Taking off his shoes, socks and other clothes except ones that go over his head

### 2-3 years

- Washing and drying his hands
- Brushing his teeth with some assistance
- Packing away his pajamas in a special place
- Helping to set the table by putting knives, forks and spoons on the table- with helpful instruction
- Clearing his own (unbreakable) plate, cutlery and empty cup
- Putting his toys away. Make it a rule that no new toy may be taken out of the toy box until the last one has been put away. One exception might be that a child may want to keep a project that he is working on out for longer.
- Arriving for meals on time. Use a timer that your child can see and give him a 5-10 minute head start. If he is on time, reward him with the first dish of pudding etc. If he is late, start without him.

### 4 Years

- Main his own bed
- Helping to clear the dishes from the table
- Dusting
- Helping to tidy up is room
- Dressing himself (with supervision)
- Rinse the bath after he's bathed

### 5 Years

- Helping with gardening
- Folding his clothes and putting them in the cupboard
- Taking the garbage out
- Answering the phone

## 6 Years

- Feeding the pet
- Folding his own clean underwear
- Tying his own shoes
- Helping in the kitchen.

### Have a family meeting

After your child's 4<sup>th</sup> birthday, you can consider having a family meeting where you discuss and assign responsibilities.

During this discussion, a good idea is to talk about what needs to be done in the house. Let every family member suggest two things that need to be done around the house and ask who would be willing to perform the various tasks. Remember to discuss how much time each chore is going to take and agree on a standard that must be met with each chore. This is a very practical way to teach your child managerial skills at a tender age!

### Model the desired behaviour

Make a chart and help your child to keep record of when he completes his chores by putting a star or a stamp somewhere to indicate when a chore is completed. It's important to give him the opportunity to personally update his chart as this sends he is the best person to monitor his efforts and that you're the parent – not the policeman or woman in his like!

You may even keep records for all the family chores on one sheet for the entire family and join him. As he sees you as the parent reward yourself with stars for the chores that were assigned to you, he will get the message that even an adult has to 'plan his work and work his plan' and that monitoring progress is not only for children.

Remember to act pleased when you see him complete a chore. He is, after all, still a child and this is all very new to him!

Also, at the end of the week, reward your child if he has completed all his chores according to the agreed standard. This way your child will feel both intrinsically as well as extrinsically motivated.

### Tips on reminders and failure

**Remind him visually.** Your child may neglect to do a chore on time. This is where a visual reminder is helpful. For example, hand him the leash for walking the dog. Make sure to discuss the action that is expected with this gesture ahead of time.

**Failure.** The difference between a 'responsibility' and a 'game' is that a responsibility implies being responsible for something that is important to a certain degree. Things can go wrong!

Doing chores take effort and many decisions must be made such as: "Can I put all the clothes in the cupboard at the same time?" or "Can I empty all the wastebaskets in the kitchen dustbin?"

The truth is that your child learns a lot from trial and error and that every failure is an opportunity to learn. As he goes along, he will learn:

- How much time a chore will take
- What steps must to be taken to complete the task
- The equipment needed to complete the task
- The mess it might make
- How to prevent an accident

Some decisions may end badly and result in upset parents, jobs having to be done twice or even broken plates and blocked drains.

It will, however, be wise to count the cost on this: say your child breaks a few dishes and you have to call in the plumber once or twice on his journey to adulthood, what is the cost really?

Even if it adds up to R2000 - is that not money well spent if it's going to teach your child two of the most important skills that he is ever going to learn: (1) how to get things done and (2) how to keep yourself accountable? Parenting is sure not for the faint hearted!

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