

Age-Appropriate Chores

There are many benefits to having children help around the home. Giving children chores can make them feel wanted, teach important life skills, and help ease the workload for parents. Recent studies have found that giving children chores from an early age will help teach them work ethic, responsibility, self-reliance, and other vital life skills.

Children are capable of handling much more than some people think. Even toddlers can help with the smallest, simplest of chores, and by the time children are teenagers, they are capable of handling most of what their parents can. The key is to start children off with small household tasks at a young age, and slowly teach them more complicated chores as they get older. In our particular context of Hong Kong I realise that often there are other significant adults helping with the running of the household, but I do believe that need not stop us from asking our children to help with some of these chores. Encouraging all adults in the house to help them develop some autonomy and find success in small gestures that contribute to family life.

The following is an ultimate listing of chores for children from age two to eighteen.

Toddlers (Ages 2-3)

Even toddlers can complete simple tasks around the home. Starting children early can help ease any arguing about doing the chores as they become older and begin to test boundaries. Toddlers are also at an age where they find the idea of helping their parents, caretakers, or older siblings one of the most exciting things they could do. This is thanks to toddlers being “copy-cats.” The primary way they learn about their world is through watching others do something, and then copying their actions.

It is important to note that toddlers will need supervision and guidance with their chores but can usually complete some tasks unsupervised by their preschool years.

A few examples of chores that toddlers can do are:

- Put their toys away
- Fill up a cat or dog's food bowl
- Place clothes in the hamper
- Dust or wipe baseboards with socks on their hands
- Pile up books and magazines on shelves or tables
- Help make the beds
- Mop small areas with a dry mop

Preschoolers (Ages 4-5)

Preschoolers still feel the same desire to help their parents, because they are still learning through copying their elders. At this age, there are even some chores children can do without supervision. Typically, these will be the ones they begin doing when toddlers, although there might be one or two new tasks, they are naturally talented at.

The reason for this increase in ability is that preschoolers have started to master the skills necessary to complete tasks unsupervised. Their hand- eye coordination will have increased, as will have their ability to follow more complex instructions. Whereas toddlers need to be told each individual step associated with a task, preschoolers may be able to remember and follow instructions up to two or three steps at a time.

In addition to the chores listed above, preschoolers can typically help with the following chores:

- Make their bed without supervision
- Clear the table
- Pull weeds
- Use a hand-held vacuum for crumbs or room edges
- Water flowers
- Put away clean utensils
- Wash plastic dishes with supervision
- Assist an older sibling with setting the table
- Help bring in light groceries
- Sort laundry into whites and colours before wash
- Match socks together
- Dust with a cloth
- Care for an animal's food and water dishes

Primary Schoolers (Ages 6-9)

Once a child reaches primary school age, they can take on a lot more responsibility without supervision. They can start learning more physically difficult or complex tasks, as they are continuing to learn the necessary skills to do so.

Parents should understand that this age group will sometimes start “rebellious” against the idea of chores, as they learn more independence. With patience, however, they will understand they are still expected to help around the home. Some children may never rebel against their chores. Whether they do or not will largely depend on their own unique personalities.

Pocket money can be an incentive and at each family's discretion used as part of the completion of chores. Often this can be a great opportunity to start educating them on how to save money for something they desire, reinforcing the benefits of effort in leading to fulfilling outcomes.

In addition to the chores listed for both toddlers and preschoolers above, primary schoolers between the ages of 6 and 9 can usually do the following chores:

- Sweep the floors
- Help make bagged or boxed lunches
- Rake the yard
- Clean their own bedrooms, with minimal supervision
- Put away the groceries
- Load the dishwasher
- Empty the dishwasher or drain
- Vacuum
- Help a parent prepare supper
- Make their own snacks/breakfast
- Scrub the table after meals
- Put away their own laundry
- Take the family dog for a walk (in the garden or with supervision)
- Wet mop
- Empty indoor trash bins into the kitchen trash

Middle Schoolers (Ages 10-13)

Preteens or middle schoolers can do many tasks on their own and can be held responsible for them without constant reminders. At this age, many families decide to create a chore chart or task list for their children. Then, parents can hold the child responsible and check just once a day to see that things were checked off the list or chart. This helps children learn not only self-reliance, but how to be responsible for themselves when nobody's looking. This can also be attached to a pocket money system should families wish.

In addition to all the tasks listed in the sections above for younger ages, children between the ages of 10 and 13 should be able to do the following chores:

- Wash the dishes or load the dishwasher without assistance
- Wash the family car
- Prepare easy meals without assistance
- Use the clothes washer and dryer
- Take the trash bins to the curb
- Take the trash to the bins
- Babysit younger siblings with parents at home

High Schoolers (Ages 14+)

By the time your child reaches high school, they can do nearly any household task you can. This is the perfect age to start making sure your child is fully prepared for the eventuality of living on their own, since those years are coming up soon. This is not to say all children fly the nest upon reaching eighteen. In fact, more children are deciding to live at home while attending college or saving for a house of their own than in recent years thanks to rising costs of living and excessive student loan debts. If staying at home longer, however, children can continue helping around the house past the age of eighteen.

In addition to the tasks listed in previous sections, children over the age of fourteen can do the following chores:

- Clean out fridge
- Help deep clean kitchen (appliances and cabinets)
- Clean the toilet, sink, and shower in the bathroom
- Babysit younger siblings independently (for short periods)
- Mow the lawn (if you have one in HK!)
- Care for pets independently (including walks)
- Make more complex meals
- Accomplish small shopping trips alone (after receiving license)
- Iron clothes
- Resew buttons on clothing
- Help parents with simple home or auto repairs

Conclusion

Children can do much more than parents might think. Even the youngest family members can help with household tasks as early as two, and by the time your child reaches their teenage years, they can do nearly any chore you can. There are many benefits to giving children chores.