

## Chores for Toddlers

It may be hard to believe that very young children can do chores, but children between the ages of two and four years are actually ripe for learning about household jobs. That's because this age group is so enthusiastic about being like – and being liked by – their parents, the most important people in their worlds. The trick is finding chores that young children are able to do.

### The littlest helpers help themselves

Toddlers will be most eager to take on small, easily mastered tasks that make them feel self-sufficient. These might include:

- learning to take off and put on simple articles of clothing, like shoes, shorts and pants
- putting their dirty clothes in a clothes basket
- putting away their toys at night
- watering plants
- feeding a pet
- turning off lights as they're carried from room to room
- taking napkins out to the dinner table each night.

Most toddlers won't be able to remember their chores every day. Nor will they always be able to do them correctly. That means that you'll need to remind them gently about their responsibilities, supervise them carefully, and be willing to help out, whether it's making sure plants get the right amount of water or cleaning up spilled cat food.

### Don't expect perfection

'A job worth doing is worth doing well' might be a popular axiom, and while it's good to encourage young children to take their responsibilities seriously, it's even more important to foster a cheerful attitude toward work – an attitude that is sure to evaporate with constant criticism. Yes, having a two-year-old set the table can mean that forks and spoons get all mixed up or that the sugar bowl gets spilled. And having an 18-month-old pick up toys can take a really, really long time, because he may get quite distracted as he discovers long-forgotten toys at the bottom of the pile. These natural tendencies can make it tempting to give up on chores for young children altogether.

But even when your child's 'help' creates more work for you rather than less, it's good to encourage him to pitch in. Chores help children feel as if they're valuable members of the household, and provide basic lessons in responsibility. Regular chores also teach young children about the rhythms of taking care of a household. Besides, if you don't introduce the notion that chores are a natural part of family life now, when they're eager and open, you'll have a much harder time enlisting their help when they're older.

### The fine line between encouraging and nagging

Try not to nag young children or use a belittling tone – that sets up resistance and a general sense that chores are onerous. Instead, prepare them for their new duties by talking about how everyone in a family needs – or even gets to – to pitch in. This appeals to their desire to be included in family activities and to develop grown-up skills. Then make a chart that lists each child's jobs, using pictures to illustrate the tasks.

If your child seems to lose interest in his job, you might try working beside him for a bit or cheerfully offer him the opportunity to pick a new one. Most important, try to make chores fun for him. Jobs that incorporate play will get done with far less fuss than those that are seen as 'work'. You can try pretending the forks and spoons are people going out to dinner on the dining room table, for instance, or that the toy cars are going to sleep in their garage (the big plastic toy bin). Likewise, you can turn picking up toys into a counting game ('Let's each pick up ten toys') or into a color sorting game ('You pick up the red toys and I'll pick up the blue ones'). And it's perfectly fine for you to help out; your willingness to lend a helping hand will help him develop a helping hand, in turn, and teach him that it's all right to ask for assistance when he needs it.

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