

actly what is expected. Be sensitive to the child's age, temperament, and experience. To introduce a task:

- **Get the child's attention.** Put the two of you on the same eye level. Remember the importance of learning styles.

- **Be specific.** "Clean your room" might mean "Put dirty clothes in the hamper, toys and books on shelf, and the bedspread pulled up."

- **Set a deadline.** For young children, an event may be better than a specific hour: "so we can go to park," "before lunch," or "immediately after dinner."

2. Offer a few choices. Children are more likely to participate if they feel they have input in the assignment. ("Do you want to empty the trash or set the table?" "Do you want to clean alone or do you want me to help?" "Do you want to pick two chores or do you want me to assign them?")

3. Create reminder systems. Two useful ones:

- **Reminder to do the task:** timer, a warning song, progress poster, string tied around the finger.

- **Reminder to do all the task:** help cards, five-finger check (see Figure 3), score card for task.

4. Provide support.

- **Be available to help.** Many children find it easier to do a task themselves if they have permission to ask for help.

- **Reward the desired behavior.**

- Rewards can be immediate (a sticker) or something the child works toward (a later bedtime, a trip to a ball game).

- Reward responsibility and initiative more than obedience. If you offer your child one sticker for picking up her toys when reminded, give her two for picking them up on her own.

- Remember to reward yourself, too!

5. Model making jobs fun. Show kids how to enjoy what must be done. A playful attitude is helpful. Pretend someone fun (dinosaur king, Power Ranger, fairy princess) is coming and you are getting ready. Be silly. Use tongs or mittens to put things away. It may slow things down but makes it fun. Make a game. Put a basketball hoop over a clothes hamper and let the child make "baskets" with his or her dirty clothes. Turn on lively music and work to that. Beat your record. Try to clean the room faster than last time.

Figure 3: Five finger check



6. Establish consequences. Clarify consequences before a child slips up. Use only consequences that you will impose with consistency. Ask more experienced children to predict your response. For example, "What do you think will happen if the timer rings and your room is still messy?" or "What will I answer if you ask to have a friend overnight and your room is not clean?"

Other Resources

Pick Up Your Socks...and Other Skills Growing Children Need by Elizabeth Crary

How Much Is Enough? by Jean Illsley Clarke, Connie Dawson and David Bredehoff

Temperament Tools: Working With Your Child's Inborn Traits by Helen Neville and Diane Clark Johnson

"Involving Children in Household Tasks: Is It Worth the Effort?" by Marty Rossman, <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/Pubs/ResearchWorks/Rossmann.html>

Figure 2: Possible tasks for different ages (after skills are taught)

Ages 2 and 3

Many toddlers want to help, but their "help" may not be useful. Keep their interest alive by involving them where you can.

- Help feed pets
- Help wipe up messes
- Shred lettuce for salad by hand
- Help mix ingredients
- Help make the bed
- Help pick up toys and books
- Put dirty clothes in the hamper when asked

Ages 6-8

School-aged children may have outgrown their interest in chores, however they do want to be independent. They may need reminding. They can handle the preceding tasks as well as:

- Help care for pets
- Empty garbage
- Make a snack
- Empty the dishwasher
- Fold and put away laundry
- Clean the car interior
- Water the garden

Ages 4 and 5

Preschoolers often like learning new chores when they are clearly explained. Capitalize on this and create a routine for chores. Besides the preceding, they can:

- Pull covers up on bed
- Set the table
- Help clear the table (non-breakable items)
- Help prepare food
- Put shoes away

Ages 9-12

Preteens are capable of more responsibility if you provide structure. Find a system that works for your family and change it only with input from all directly affected. Preteens can handle all of the preceding tasks as well as:

- Prepare simple meals
- Clean kitchen counters, sink, and bathroom, vacuum
- Load the dishwasher.
- Pack their own lunches
- Operate the washer and dryer
- Rake leaves