

CHORES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

IN THIS SHEET

- **Who is doing what chores**
- **The different types of jobs that people do**
- **What to consider when giving chores**
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The carrying out of chores or chores being left undone, is a constant source of irritation for many parents. Surveys indicate that only 20% of mothers and 10% of fathers are happy with the amount of housework their teenagers do.

The most common tasks that teenagers are involved with include: preparing or clearing the meal table, making beds, washing up or loading and unloading the dishwasher, vacuuming or dusting, ironing, babysitting, shopping, cleaning windows, gardening and cooking for themselves.

In years 7 and 8, girls and boys are likely to spend similar amounts of time on housework. However, as children get older, girls tend to do more housework than boys do. When teens reach around 15 or 16 years, they spend more time with friends and in extra curricular activities, or in paid jobs and are

thus less available for chores around the house.

For boys, the amount of housework performed by fathers has a huge influence on how much they do. Similarly, mothers influence girls. Yet, there are many other influencing factors. Teenagers (especially girls) with mothers in the workforce are usually more involved in domestic chores. Equally, teenagers from large families or single parent families tend to do more housework.

The jobs that parents give their children are prone to sex typing. Boys are more likely to do outdoor chores such as gardening, mowing lawns or removing rubbish. By contrast, girls do indoor chores such as laundry, kitchen work, cleaning the house, and (the most time consuming one of all) taking care of young children.

Teenagers who plan to continue studying are also more likely to help with housework than others are.

WAYS TO THINK ABOUT HOUSEHOLD CHORES

Parents need to take into account the huge variety in household chores. The contribution of children cannot be measured simply by the amount of time they spend doing jobs.

One child could spend an hour washing the family cars while another could spend the same hour sitting with a sick grandparent, giving the main carer a break. Both jobs are valuable for family relations and the running of the household, but they are difficult to compare.

Essentially, there are two types of household chores:

Self-care (looking after one's own space and things)
Family-care (chores beyond one's own things that help the family).

Tasks in the 'family-care' category are related to positive concern for others. Self-care work is not. Family-care tasks

are more likely than self-care tasks to promote a sense of responsibility and participation in the family.

Many parents find it difficult to motivate teenagers to do chores. In some families 'battles' rage constantly and may not stop until the young people leave home.

Parents use a variety of means to encourage teenagers to do housework. Rewards may include payments or other incentives while punishments can include the denial of privileges or other negative consequences.

Most parents make a conscious attempt to hand out chores that are age appropriate. For example, you would not ask a five-year-old to single-handedly paint the lounge room. You assign simple tasks to young children, more complex tasks to older children and the most complex chores such as cooking a family meal, to older teenagers.

IDEAS

When considering chores and how to get teenagers to participate, it is usually best to focus on general household chores. To simplify matters, treat things like the state of their bedroom and their personal cleanliness as a separate issue.

For example, a common concern for many parents is their teenager's messy bedroom. For

many teenagers, this can be how they express their individuality. It might help you to think about this as a privacy issue for your child and not include it in the list of household chores. As far as possible, let teenagers themselves make decisions about these. For more information on how to decide what jobs to include on a list, refer to the *Decision making and responsibility* sheets in this series.

When considering which jobs your children can do, it's useful to take into account:

- Your child's skills and ability
- Their availability when the job needs to be done
- The amount of effort required by you to get them to do the task.

Keep in mind that children and teenagers tend to follow their parents in engaging in gender-based tasks. One way, and probably the best way, to encourage teenagers to tackle non-traditional gender role tasks are to set the example. Setting the example starts from a young age. Boys are especially more likely to do housework and other chores traditionally done by women if they see their fathers doing them.

Don't be too fussy about the standard of housework or the time your teenager takes to do it, especially early on. Standards

usually get better and unnecessary fussiness is a real turn-off for adolescents. Having standards that are too high or constantly complaining about the quality of the work they do, can also have negative results. Teenagers may lose heart and stop trying. If they're going to be criticised, it may as well be for not doing their chores rather than doing them badly.

TROUBLESHOOTING

In households where chores and getting them done become an issue, a family meeting can be a useful tool. Hold a meeting with the sole purpose of dividing household chores. Begin the meeting by producing a complete list of chores. Then, ask everyone to put their views forward. Your aim is to get everyone to agree to a fair distribution of tasks.

Teenagers are much more likely to do their share of chores without complaining, if they can see that everyone is equally involved. They are more positive if they believe the load is fairly distributed and that they are contributing to the smooth running of the family rather than just following orders.

Think carefully before you decide to pay children for doing household chores. Sometimes parents begin this practice and then find it difficult to maintain. In addition, paying children for jobs sometimes brings out the

worst in them. Some of them will continually try to negotiate new terms with parents, asking for more money for extra chores and bargaining about the ones they are doing.

When it comes to deciding who does what, think about stereotypes. It can be refreshing for everyone and broadening for teenagers if girls do their share of outdoor work and boys do their share of ironing.

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