



Skills *for* life

Teaching kids simple household chores sets them up for adulthood, while allowing them to feel competent and responsible in the here and now. *Kate Farr reports*

While many of us in DB are fortunate enough to have a helper to help with the daily chores, outsourcing all of the domestic drudgery can have some unexpected disadvantages. For kids who are accustomed to always having ‘Auntie’ around, the university years, and the subsequent forays into independent adulthood can come as a pretty rude awakening. Ultimately, it falls to us parents to ensure that our kids turn out to be productive people, rather than pampered princes and princesses. Here are some helpful strategies.

Constructive games

Ever noticed how your toddler mimics everything you do? Small children are like sponges soaking up the influences around them, and, at this age, the strongest influence of all comes from their parents. Model the type of behaviour that you would like them to learn and encourage them to help with simple household tasks as early as possible.

Most little ones adore tidy-up games, so ensure that your toy storage is accessible, bust out a tidying song, and encourage them to be in charge of putting away

their own playthings. This helps to reinforce the importance of looking after treasured items and soon becomes second nature.

Sweeping and vacuuming are endlessly fascinating to babies and a soft duster is a safe tool for little hands. Laundry time is another great opportunity to turn a chore into fun. Toddlers love to load washing into the machine (be vigilant for stray Duplo and toy cars) and pass pegs... and sock-pairing becomes a great game when they’re matching up colours.

Once they are slightly older, say ►

around four, it's time to engage kids in the kitchen. Chat about ingredients and ask them to name as many of them as they can. Enlist their help in finding items from the cupboards and fridge, and reinforce this by asking them to help put away groceries in the correct locations. If you have the space, get them to stand on a low stool and get hands-on with the food prep. Scooping, spreading, whisking and even some carefully supervised chopping allows children to understand how their meals end up on the table, and can be instrumental in broadening a fussy eater's culinary horizons.

If time allows, a regular themed food day is a good way to get kids excited about eating. Ask them to pick a country from a map, then spend some time researching facts about the culture, people and, of course, the food. The grand finale is to shop for ingredients together and cook a meal from the chosen country to eat as a family.

Weekly chores

Once children start primary school, get them involved with the process of packing their own lunch. Make an event of it by choosing a new lunchbox together (bento boxes or stackable tiffins allow for lots of different flavours). Then make a 'menu card' of options that includes plenty of fresh fruit and veggies, a protein, a carbohydrate and something sweet. Kids can 'place their order' for the week ahead by ticking individual items from each category then helping to shop for ingredients at the supermarket.

Pocket money can be a major motivator for kids, especially if they are saving up for something really special. While bribing children with cash to get them to do their chores is not recommended, a small cash reward can be a little extra incentive



Assign teens with regular chores

A soft duster is a safe tool for little hands

Encourage kids to get hands-on with food prep

for them to go above and beyond at home. Examples might include stripping the sheets from the family's beds, or helping younger siblings with their own tidying up.

Tweens become increasingly independent and, from around 10 or 11 years, they can tackle some of the less pleasant household jobs, such as cleaning surfaces, washing up, emptying bins and even scrubbing toilets. This serves to reinforce the message that a clean home takes some effort, and that 'the rubbish fairy' doesn't actually spirit their discarded wrappers away. It will also stand them in good stead for maintaining shared student accommodation in years to come.

Taking charge

By the time your children are hitting their teens, they should have a regular roster of household tasks to tackle with minimal supervision. This helps to build trust, and sets a benchmark for cleanliness for your soon-to-be-

independent young people. Now is also the time to discuss other practicalities, such as how to open bank accounts, pay bills and set up utilities, along with the importance of budgeting and saving.

Whether your teen is a dab hand in the kitchen or completely disinterested in culinary creations, a cooking course that covers all the basics can be a wise move, equipping them with the tools they'll need to feed themselves in the outside world. Designate one night per week for your older teen to take charge of feeding the family, meaning that they get to hone their skills while you reap the benefits.

By continually reinforcing the message that household chores are everyone's responsibility, parents are giving their offspring valuable life skills that they can draw on throughout their lives. And the earlier you start, the less resistance you're likely to encounter along the way. So grab your toddler and a dustpan, and get to work. **B**

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