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LEARNING HOUSEHOLD CHORES BENEFIT CHILDREN

Would you like your children to help with household chores? Why?

According to Elizabeth Crary in her book, "Pick Up Your Socks ... and other skills growing children need!" the most common reasons why parents want their children's help include:

- **To share the workload.** Maintaining a household requires numerous tasks. The work may seem unending. In addition, some parents feel their children will not be as messy if they are involved in the clean-up process.
- **To learn housekeeping skills.** These skills will be needed when children leave home. It's easiest to learn these skills as a child, no different than learning to read or ride a bike. It can be embarrassing as an adult, not to know how to cook, clean, do laundry, make simple repairs, and manage money.
- **To contribute to the family.** Everyone can contribute, but the contribution will vary with age and ability. Working together as a family to clean the house develops a spirit of teamwork.
- **To learn responsibility.** Many parents use household chores as a way of developing lifelong habits of responsibility.

The reason you have your children do chores will affect what your children learn. If you wish to teach skills, you will want to rotate the tasks so children become competent in doing many tasks. On the other hand, if your goal is to reduce the workload, it maybe easier to teach children only a few tasks that they learn to do well. If the family contribution is important, a time to work together will need to be established.

What tasks can a three, six, or nine-year-old do? This is dependent on the child's age, ability, and interest. Learning these tasks take time. First a child needs instruction on how to do it and parental help. Next, supervision will be needed to ensure the task is done and done correctly. Finally, the task can be done alone without supervision.

A study of Washington State families conducted by Elizabeth Crary suggested that children could begin learning tasks at the following ages:

- Age 3: dress self, brush teeth, bathe self
- Age 4: pick-up belongings, wipe spills, set table
- Age 5: make bed, vacuum, take out trash, fix snack
- Age 6-8: cook meal, clean sink
- Age 9: do laundry

Most tasks taught continue to need supervision until children reach 10-12 years of age. Then just when you think they can operate independently they

reach the teen years and once again need to be reminded of their responsibilities.

To effectively teach children household tasks consider these steps:

1. **State exactly what needs to be done.** If the task is "pick up your room", what does that mean?
2. **Introduce the task.** You can show, tell, and/or do it with the child. Different techniques work better with different children.
3. **Set a time line.** By what time does the task need to be completed? Perhaps the task "pick up your room" needs to be completed before going to school or before the child can play with friends after school.
4. **Establish standards.** For example, "pick up your room" means: put away toys, throw out trash, hang up clothes, and make the bed.

Teaching household chores takes a time investment on the part of the parents, but ultimately becomes a time-saver with many benefits.