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HIDDEN DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN WHO DO HOUSEHOLD CHORES

Little helping hands



Merrin Schnabel, below, gives sons Jack and Luke daily chores to do and says she has noticed a difference in their self-confidence.

WELLBEING

JOANNA HALL

Making the bed and washing the dishes are boring household chores we repeat every day, but it turns out that doing them is also great for your health.

Engaging in routine activity is important for brain health and longevity, with a recent study revealing that doing chores is linked to lower dementia risk. But it's not just adults who benefit; where children are concerned, doing chores teaches them more than just housekeeping skills.

A 2020 study by LaTrobe University followed 207 children aged between five and 13, and how doing chores helped their "executive function".

The results, published in May 2022 in Australian Occupational Therapy, found regular chores promote positive behaviours including better planning, self-regulation, switching between tasks, and remembering instructions. Additionally, engagement in self-care chores such as making themselves a meal, and family-care chores such as making someone else a meal, helped with memory and the ability to think before acting.

Get started

- 1 Do the chore with your child until they can do it on their own. Show them by doing, encourage them to persevere, and enjoy saying "we did it!" as a team.
- 2 Be clear about your expectations for chores for each day and each week and how well you want the job to be done, so you're not frustrated if it's not done "properly" because your child didn't know what you wanted.
- 3 Allow choice and establish boundaries. Some jobs need to be done on set days, every day, or once a week, so make sure you are clear about what's fixed and what's flexible.

More tips at lifeskills4kids.com.au
Source: Deb Hopper

"Parents may be able to use age and ability-appropriate chores to facilitate the development of executive functions," says Deanna Pepper, a PhD candidate and one of the study's lead researchers. "Children who cook a family meal or weed the garden regularly may be more likely to excel in other aspects of life, like schoolwork or problem-solving."

Pediatric occupational therapist Deb Hopper agrees.

"Research from the Centre of Parenting indicates that children who are regularly involved in household chores have higher self-esteem, are more responsible, and are better able to deal with obstacles," she says. "This translates to a positive impact later in life."

Sharing housework can also help reduce family stress. "With both parents at work in 64 per cent of Australian families, finding time to get the housework done and enjoying quality time together can be challenging," says Hopper. "Household chores provide a way for you to do both."

WHEN TO START

When it comes to a "good" age to get started, Hopper says the younger the better.

"The best predictor of young adults' success in their mid-20s was that they participated in household tasks from when they were three or four," says Hopper.

"Age-appropriate chores for children that young can be as simple as pulling up their bed covers."

Hopper also recommends starting small.

"Use positive praise when the job is done, and point out what is good about the work they have completed

and how they have helped the family," she says.



SELF-WORTH

Merrin Schnabel, 42, is the founder of the Geelong Women's Business Club and a mum to Jack, 12, and Luke, 10, and doing chores is a part of their day-to-day life.

"We give the boys a range of chores, but the main area they have to keep tidy is their bedrooms," she says. "It's their responsibility and one that gets checked daily."

Jack and Luke also do general chores, demonstrating collaboration as a family. "They do the dishes, feed our pets and help me put the rubbish out," says Schnabel. "Since implementing these responsibilities I have seen a big difference in the boys. They are more aware, clear with their direction, responsible, and more confident in doing things themselves. They have a sense of self-worth, happiness and independence."

It also gives the family more quality time together. "If they are helping the family by doing chores, I then have more time to focus on (coaching their) basketball. Work-life balance means everyone has to do their bit so we can all be functional and happy, and it makes us feel part of something."

Inflation: our biggest cost worry



ANTHONY KEANE

Putting food on the table is the biggest financial worry for Australians in 2023, and almost half are not confident that the government and Reserve Bank can ease inflation next year.

Research from Canstar found concerns over everyday household costs have surged, and groceries are the biggest pain point for nearly one in five, followed by rent, energy, mortgage and fuel costs. People concerned most about groceries tripled in five years to 18 per cent, it found, and consumers are being urged to sharpen their savings focus.

Canstar's Consumer Pulse Report 2022 also found 44 per cent of people lack confidence that authorities can slow the surge in living costs, with women more pessimistic than men, and 33 per cent are currently stressed about their finances.

Canstar group executive of financial services Steve Mickenbecker says "it's a matter of how long households will be able to grin and bear it before they find themselves in a dire financial situation".

"We can't reduce the inflation rate but we can change our behaviours," he says. "It sounds cliched, but cheaper cuts of meat, a different location or style of accommodation, lower loan interest rates and less wastage. It's time to review the budget and remember it won't be forever."

Canstar's tips to reduce inflation at home include:

- Search for discounted gift cards and use them to save at the shops.
- Cut your biggest expense first, typically mortgage and rent, by negotiating with your lender or landlord, or switching to better deals.
- Treat insurance renewal notices as a chance to shop around and save, because new customers often pay less.

There are several other ways for people to reduce grocery costs: always shop with a list, consider supermarket labels for cheaper options, and rethink loyalty to just one chain.

MyBudget founder Tammy Barton suggests shopping online and seeking specials. "There are great apps out there that can help to find the best deals - like WiseList," she says.

Barton recommends using reward programs. For example, Woolworths Everyday Rewards can be used to get \$10 shopping discounts and more.