

Chores and Kids: How Much Should You Expect?

You can help your kids mature by gradually increasing the expectations you place on them, including being more responsible for themselves and helping around the house. But how much can you expect?

What can kids do?

Children over 2 are able to help with chores. With younger children, focus on their personal responsibilities, such as putting their toys away. Older children can be expected to take on responsibilities around the house. (Remember that these kids can operate fairly complicated video games and are whizzes with the DVD remote. Operating a dial and button on the washing machine should present no difficulty.)

With any new chores, first show your child how things should be done, then work with him to complete the task. Once he masters the task, he can do it independently. Here's a list of tasks – with ages at which you can introduce them:

- Kids age 3 to 4 can:
 - pick up toys
 - set the table (an adult should place heavy plates or glass items on the table)
 - dust furniture
 - put clothes in the hamper
- Kids age 4 to 6 can:
 - make their beds
 - feed pets, with adult oversight required
 - clear their own dishes after a meal
 - empty wastebaskets
 - clean up spills using a dust pan and brush – if the brush is hung low enough for them to reach
- Kids age 7 to 9 can:
 - vacuum or sweep the floor
 - wipe kitchen counters and table
 - load and start washing machine (mom or dad can do the sorting)
 - load dishes into the dishwasher
 - assist with cooking simple foods
 - make and pack their own lunches
- Kids age 10 to 12 can:
 - do simple yard work
 - mow the lawn, with supervision
 - prepare a simple meal
 - clean bathrooms
 - wash windows
 - fold laundry

Kids age 13 and up are capable of doing most anything around the house. At this age, sending them to the local store for a small list of items may boost their confidence.

Resist the temptation to do over anything your child has done. Don't rearrange the dishwasher or re-wipe the bathroom sink. Thank your child for her help.

Kids take to chores more easily at a young age, but may start to balk at them as they get older. It may be helpful to have a household rule, such as chores before television, video games or play with friends.

How much should kids do?

There is no hard and fast rule about how many chores are appropriate for your child. Kids in elementary school should be expected to do 10 to 20 minutes of helping around the house. You can expect a little more on the weekends and in the summer. Teenagers can do 20 to 30 minutes, with bigger chores, such as lawn-mowing, on the weekends.

Reviewed by: [Patrick S. Pasquariello Jr., MD](#)

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