

How To Get The Kids to Help

By Betty Moore

Most parents, single or otherwise, are too busy and too tired to think through the question, "When are kids old enough to start helping out routinely?" Then the dreadful day arrives when you realize you are picking up after kids who are plenty capable of picking up, hanging up, washing up and getting themselves up on their own and you have to fight to get anything done! You know to your toes you've created a monster or two or more. You look down the years ahead and entertain the idea of getting on a bus to Cleveland (if you're already in Cleveland, think about Omaha) and changing your name to Mielke Monet (my childhood movie star name I made up from my milk money). What to do?

Okay, it may be too late for you or me, sorry, but let's help all the parents whose kids are between four and ten years of age because there's still time. Here's something simple that will work with most kids.

Tomorrow, when you get home, take your kids one by one to their bedrooms and cheerfully tell them, "Okay, this is a good place to plan what I need you to do around the house today. Suzy, before dinner I need you to pick up your school stuff, take out the garbage, and get your laundry from the couch and put it away. After dinner I need you to get your homework done and feed the cat. Okay?" If Suzy smiles and heads off to do all that and more you may be in the wrong house – or not! Still, even if she does agree, there will be battles down the road, guaranteed.

The next child hears the list and digs in the heels, throws a fit or whatever that child does to get his or her feelings made clear. "Oh shoot", you say. "Well, stay here and think about it and when you're ready to help, come on out and get your work done."

For these (ahem) "reluctant" children, whether it takes a day or a week, let them stay in their rooms for however long it takes. These kids are often the "baby" of the family, used to having others take care of their every need and desire. DON'T get in a power struggle with your child. Bring meals in to their room, take them to the bathroom, read them to sleep, kiss them off to school, and so on. But when they are home, back to the bedroom they go as the family goes about its business. The day will come, sooner rather than later, when these kids will come out of their rooms and get their chores done.

No matter how helpful the kids get, make it a daily practice to start chore time in the bedroom, not as a punishment, but simply as a way to plan what needs to be done. Adults need a time and place to regroup and plan what they need to do. And so do kids.

Eventually, after a relapse here and there, you'll hear your kids in the back seat on the way home from daycare or school asking each other what chores they're going to do when they get home. And you'll forget all about the bus to Cleveland. Or was it Omaha?

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