

Working Towards Responsibility by Sandra Westcott

As children grow, they should become more responsible - more willing to help, more aware of the needs of others, more able to manage tasks on their own. By eighteen, parents want children to know both what needs to be done to handle everyday life and how to accomplish these jobs. Nurturing a responsible attitude is the first item on the "parent job description". How do we begin? Can it be enjoyable? What responsibilities can we expect children to assume at different ages?

Always bear in mind your child's stage of development when you ask him to assume a responsibility.

- * The interests of young children, from birth to age 6 focus on self care leading to physical independence.
- * During the 6-12 years, children are interested in decision-making which leads to mental independence.
- * During adolescence, financial independence becomes the chief concern.

Naturally, after your child has learned a particular skill, it becomes a habit of everyday living. That's why the following list of suggested responsibilities is cumulative.

Be sure to talk from time to time with your children about the chores they consider interesting and fun, and those they find boring and disagreeable. Use your child's birthday as an excuse to schedule the discussion. You might make a list together of jobs they'd like to try and jobs they want to avoid. The results may surprise you! The jobs your children want might be harder and more time-consuming than the ones they hate. Why? Certain jobs seem more interesting or challenging. Maybe they involve real adult responsibilities. By allowing your children to try a challenging job, you give them the chance to feel the same pride and self-confidence we get from doing satisfying work.

What tasks fill the "Chores I Hate" column? Picking up dirty clothes, weeding the garden, making the bed, taking out the garbage? They may be boring, but dull jobs are a part of life, too. Point out the positive results of your children's assistance. "Bring down your laundry so you'll have clean clothes tomorrow." "If we finish the housework together on Saturday morning, we'll have time to go swimming in the afternoon." Nobody likes to work alone. By including one of your children in a task you have chosen, you are spending time together, which is much more fun for everyone! Remember to notice and praise your child's completion of a job, even if he only does it occasionally at first.

Never expect a standard of orderliness or cleanliness from your child that you would not demand from yourself. It's good to examine periodically your own standards. Make sure you don't ask for the impossible! Provide the means required for your child to complete the job. For instance, putting toys on shelves is only possible if there is enough space on the shelves for all the toys.

Keep your child's schedule in mind when assigning chores. Make your system flexible enough to work around sport practices, music lessons, and outdoor play. Don't ask your child to do so many jobs he feels overwhelmed. Remember most children need to have tasks broken down into steps. "Clean your room" is ambiguous. What does it involve? Define your tasks together. Accept the fact that you will probably have to work alongside your child if you want the job done your way.

Sandra Westcott's parent handout on building responsibility provides sensible advice for supporting Montessori principles at home

Home Responsibilities

The following list was compiled by parents and teachers. You may add to it as you try various tasks and see that they are appropriate for a particular age group.

For Two and Three Year Olds

Be sure you supply tools children can handle before asking them to do the job.

- * Pick up toys and put them away in the correct place.
- * Put books on shelf, magazines in a rack, and newspapers in the recycling area.
- * Sweep the floor with a child-sized broom.
- * Set the table.
- * Clean under the table after meals with a dustpan and brush.
- * Choose between two different foods for breakfast and lunch.
- * Carry his own dish and silverware to the kitchen after meals. Scrape the plate. Place it on the counter or in the dishwasher.
- * Learn to use the toilet.
- * Brush teeth, wash and dry hands, and brush hair. You will need to supply a sturdy stool in the bathroom so your child can see himself in the mirror.
- * Undress himself. Dress himself with some help.
- * Mop up spills or accidents.
- * Put away boxes or cans from the grocery store on lower shelves.
- * Accompany you to the recycling center and carry items from the car to the various bins.

For Four and Five Year Olds

This is a good age to begin using a goal chart. Choose jobs together and put them on the chart. When the jobs are done, the child and parents enjoy a special treat together.

- * Help with grocery shopping and suggest foods to purchase.
- * Polish shoes.
- * Feed and water pets.
- * Assist with raking, weeding and planting.
- * Help make his bed.
- * Help vacuum with electric broom or lightweight vacuum.
- * Help fill and empty the dishwasher.
- * Dust furniture.
- * Begin some "cooking", such as pouring his own drink, spreading peanut butter on bread, pouring cereal, adding topping to gelatin or ice cream, tearing up lettuce for a salad, adding certain ingredients to a dish mom or dad is cooking, holding the electric mixer to mash potatoes or combine ingredients for a cake, prepare plates for the family dinner, clean up afterwards.
- * Bring in the mail.
- * Polish silver, help polish the car.
- * Sharpen pencils.
- * Dressing on his own including choosing an outfit for the day.
- * Learning to tie his shoes.
- * Scrubbing the sink, toilet and bathtub.
- * Cleaning mirrors and windows.

- * Separate the wash into various loads
- * Folding clothes and putting them away.
- * Learn to answer the telephone and how to dial emergency numbers.
- * Help clean out the interior of the car.
- * Take out the garbage.
- * Begin learning social skills: Sharing toys with playmates, asking before going out to play, etc. The child should be able to play for short periods without adult attention.
- * Begin to suggest family activities he would like to be taken from the "entertainment fund".
- * Begin handling money - paying for small purchases in cash and receiving change.

For Six and Seven-Year Olds

- * Water house plants, the lawn and outdoor flowers.
- * Sweep and hose off the patio or deck.
- * Begin using sharp knives to peel vegetables and the stove and microwave to prepare simple foods.
- * Carry in the grocery sacks.
- * Prepare his own school lunch.
- * Gather wood for the fireplace.
- * Take his dog for a walk (if the dog is not too big).
- * Give the dog a bath.
- * Be responsible for bandaging minor injuries.
- * Wash out the trash cans.
- * Wash walls; mop floors.
- * Straighten or clean the silverware drawer.
- * Hang his own clothes in the closet.
- * Do simple ironing.
- * Leave the bathroom in order; hang up towels, put dirty clothes in hamper, etc.
- * Care for his bicycle, including locking it when not in use.
- * Care for outdoor play equipment.
- * Use an alarm clock to get himself up in the morning. Go to bed at night on his own.
- * Carry lunch money and notes to school.
- * Run errands in the neighborhood when parents ask.
- * Take telephone messages and write them down.

For Eight and Nine-Year Olds

- * Mop or buff the wooden, tile or vinyl flooring.
- * Wax the furniture.
- * Clean miniblinds.
- * Straighten his own closet and drawers.
- * Run his own bath.
- * Fold his blankets.
- * Perform minor repairs to clothing, such as replacing buttons or sewing rips in clothing.
- * Scoop up animal waste in the yard or house, including cleaning the cat box.
- * Shop for and select his own clothing and shoes along with a parent.
- * Change to play clothes after school without being asked.

- * Begin to read recipes and cook occasionally for the family.
- * Cut flowers and make a centerpiece.
- * Pick fruit off trees or bushes.
- * Build a campfire.
- * Prepare food for cooking outdoors, such as hamburgers or shishkebobs.
- * Paint a fence or shelf.
- * Begin to write letters and thank you notes.
- * Feed the baby occasionally.
- * Watch younger siblings briefly as long as parents are available. For example, playing a game with a sibling while dad mows the lawn and mom is grocery shopping.
- * Know how to cross streets safely: Do so without assistance.

For Ten and Eleven-Year Olds

- * Strip the bed and replace the dirty sheets with clean ones.
- * Operate the washer and dryer including measuring of detergent, fabric softener and bleach.
- * Buy groceries using a list; choose more economical brands by using comparison shopping.
- * Keep track of his own schedule including regularly scheduled practices, doctor and dental appointments, etc.
- * Receive and answer mail addressed to him.
- * Pouring and preparing tea, coffee and cold drinks.
- * Waiting on guests.
- * Plan his own parties.
- * Know simple first aid.
- * Learn to use a sewing machine.
- * Learn about bank accounts. Begin savings account.
- * Wash the family car.

For Eleven and Twelve-Year Olds

- * Begin earning his own money by mowing lawns, babysitting, etc.
- * Learn safety rules for staying at home alone.
- * Learn to take public transportation such as light rail or bus.
- * Pack his own suitcase for overnight trips.
- * Take responsibility for his own hobbies.
- * Learn to handle himself safely and politely when in public places alone or with peers.
- * Join organizations and take some responsibility for leadership.
- * Dress and undress younger siblings and put them to bed.
- * Clean the pool and pool deck.
- * Run his own errands when reasonable.
- * Mow the lawn and learn lawn mower care and maintenance.
- * Work along with parents during home repair or construction projects.
- * Clean the oven and refrigerator.
- * Set his own schedule to manage homework and instrument practice.
- * Learn to pump gas and add oil to the car.
- * Purchase his own treats.

For Adolescents

- * Be able to determine his own bedtime.
- * Be able to discuss and decide along with parents his curfew for evening gatherings.
- * Take complete responsibility for preparing a family meal.
- * Learn and understand how to maintain good health through exercise, adequate rest, weight control, eating nutritious food, and annual check-ups.
- * Begin to anticipate the needs of family members and friends and offer to help.
- * Understand and accept his capabilities and limitations.
- * Respect himself and take responsibility for his decisions.
- * Demonstrate loyalty, honesty, and respect to others.

If you are patient with your children, add responsibility as they become developmentally ready for it and express your appreciation for their involvement with the family, you will earn their gratitude when they are young adults. All parents want their children to become independent, competent adults. Using these suggestions will help!!

