

Getting children to do chores

It is of little surprise that most children are not bursting at the seams to do chores. Life, to them, is about having fun, and very rarely are chores perceived as being fun. Nevertheless, they are necessary because they help households function. Getting help from all members of the household ensures that everyone under the same roof has an opportunity to enjoy much needed downtime. Yet getting everyone in the house to cooperate and help out can be painful and energy draining.

Ways household chores are avoided

There are multiple ways children try to avoid household chores. None are exclusive to a child of a certain age or gender. Regardless of the strategy used to get out of completing household tasks, the end goal for non-helpers is the same – to avoid doing tasks. The reasons for not completing requested/expected tasks is often a simple one – it is a lot nicer if someone else does it. If someone else completes a task then the non-helper has more time to do the things they enjoy. Their focus is seldom acknowledges, even if adults explain it, that not doing their tasks makes other people upset, tired and feel underappreciated.

A common avoidance technique used by children to dodge chores includes a complaint involving feeling sick. Because sickness may well be the cause, it is necessary to check if sickness is present. It is often easy to tell how a child is feeling based on how they were acting and playing five minutes prior. If prior observations indicate children were acting and feeling seemingly normal before the chore request then it is easy to dispute the child's desire to avoid completing a task. The trick, as always, when disputing the child's illness claim is not getting caught in the argument that leads to the second avoidance tactic outlined next.

The tactic of encouraging an argument is a well-used and much practiced art-form. Pulling adults into an argument shifts focus away from the initial chore request. Although it might be easy to believe that it is less nice to argue than complete a five minute chore, children will, despite them not being conscious of the fact, opt for the argument every time. Arguments won by the child frequently prevent adults from remembering chore requests. If, even if it is only on one occasion, children are able to avoid completing a task because they have geared an argument outcome in their favour, they will employ the same tactic over and over again in the future.

"It's too hard" is often another tactic spotted in the chore avoidance arena. Despite the adult knowing the child's capabilities to complete a task, this saying will be reused over and over again. Trying to throw an adult's resolve off balance, making them doubt the child's ability to complete the task is the end goal.

Promises are another popular tactic used to get out of completing chores. Some children, despite their lack of formal training, are excellent negotiators. They will swing promises like a carrot in front of a donkey's face to convince adults to delay or stall their chore duties. For example, they will promise to complete their task once they have finished playing or in the next ad break. While some children will stick to the promises they make regarding doing their chores, many will not. Ensuring the child sticks to the revised time frame will ensure children will not employ one of the other avoidance tactics to delay the task a second time around. As such, negotiating new time limits means adults need to have good memories to remember to chase the child up and make them stick to their end of the agreement when the new time limit has lapsed.

Strategies to support children to complete chores

Offering help can often be a successful strategy employed by adults to get children to complete their tasks. Naturally, help tends to be offered more to younger children than older children, but it can never be underestimated how much older children appreciate help and one-one-on time with the adult. Ensuring help is offered can support children to complete their assigned tasks.

Ensuring that the chore is age and developmentally appropriate can help affirm the adult's position and assist them in staying strong when getting the child to complete their jobs. Setting up reasonable time limits and digestible cleaning or tidying chunks can make tasks more manageable, thus making children lean towards compliance rather than defiance.

Quite often time pressures see adults caught between the knowledge that letting their child leave the house without completing a chore sends the wrong message and leaving the house late to ensure a chore is completed impedes other schedules, for example, getting to school or work on time. When time and chore compliance are not on the same page, delaying a chore can be a helpful strategy. For example, rather than trying to enforce the idea that the child needs to pack away all of their toys before they leave the house, the adult can simply ensure that packing them away when returning to the house is the child's first port of call. Allowing this delay to occur takes the pressure off adults. Simultaneously, it still sends the message that non-compliance will not help the child avoid doing the task. As the child becomes acquainted with this strategy they will develop the understanding that no matter what they will not be able to avoid completing the task.

Finding the carrot is another strategy that can have a lot of success. Sometimes children flatly refuse to complete some of their tasks. When these incidents occur adults have one of two obvious options. Enforce it by going blue in the face or enforcing it when the adult has a carrot to hang in front of the child's face. In lay terms, the meaning of a carrot in this instance is using something the child is motivated to get or do as the tool that guides them in certain directions. For example, if a child will not put their dish in the sink, then wait until they want something to get them to do it. Even if the dish has been washed, because mum or dad could not stand having a dirty dish lying around the house all day, the child can get a clean dish, take it out of the drawer, put it on the table and then return it to the drawer, thus teaching them that, whether it is now or later, all requested/expected tasks will be completed.

Summing it up

Few children have a tendency to bounce up and down when asked to complete their chores. Not surprisingly, when children assist other household members to complete chores everything within the household runs more smoothly and allows everyone to get some downtime. Rarely do children consider the impacts their chore refusals have on others, meaning that they will employ a range of techniques designed to get them out of their chores. One such strategy is complaining of sickness. Gauging how a child was playing and behaving prior to the chore request helps adults know when to pursue their initial request and ignore such complaints. Arguments are often another commonly observed strategy. Although few people, children included, enjoy arguments it is not uncommon for them to erupt when chore requests are made. Knowing how to keep the conversation focused on the request rather than the finer details of an argument will aid adult success in getting children to complete their tasks. Children often state that it is too hard for them to complete a task. Ensuring chores are manageable and age-appropriate assists adults to achieve greater success. Promises are always a popular strategy used by children of all ages. Negotiating an alternative time to complete a task can yield desired results, but usually only when adults follow through and ensure that the alternative agreement is upheld. Offering help on occasions can assist adults in achieving improved results. Delaying the adult's request until a metaphorical carrot can be used provides the necessary motivation to encourage children to complete their chores with less fuss. Getting a child to complete a task at a later time can help enforce the idea that regardless of a child's stalling tactics or refusal attempts, the expectation to complete the chore is and will always be present.

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