

Catholic Parenting 101

Tips to Get Kids to Do Their Chores

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Nothing sparks more family conflicts than the efforts of stressed-out parents to get children to do chores. It is a long established belief that good things happen when children do their chores. Such activities help children to grow in character as they learn diligence, responsibility, and initiative. Children also learn that they have an important role in the family.

To help take the challenge out of chores, here are a few easy tips can help you motivate your children to do their part when it comes to chores.

- 1. Start at an early age.** Children in preschool often find chores interesting and rewarding. They get to experience giving back to their families for the first time. Research also suggests that children who start out doing chores in preschool are more likely to be better adjusted as adults.
- 2. Teach them how.** Children typically need additional training and mentoring to do their chores. Before turning them loose to work on their own, consider creating a detailed "job list" that names each expected task of the chore. This will guide them once they are on their own.
- 3. Set a good example.** When possible, do your chores around the house at the same time your child does his or hers. Watching others and joining the activity often motivates children.
- 4. Create a structure.** Clarify when chores are to be done and the consequences of not doing them. For example, tell your child, "Your room needs to be cleaned Saturday morning before you turn on the TV or connect with your friends." Timers can also help you and your child keep on track. You might say to your child, "You have 30 minutes to clean your room. If you finish before the timer goes off you can play on the computer when you

are done." Then wind up the timer and let it tick loudly within earshot of your child to remind him or her to stay on task.

- 5. Use rewards to get things started.** When you begin requiring chores (or begin again, as is often the case!), consider offering a temporary incentive, such as a special meal, snack, or activity. Rewards like this are most effective to get a new behavior started. However, they often become cumbersome and can even backfire when used long term. Over the long term, expect your verbal praise and the simple satisfaction of getting chores completed to be enough of a reward for your child.
- 6. Use family meetings.** Family meetings can be a good time to notice and encourage children for their work. Point out how important it is and how good it feels to serve each other and to be served in this way. This can also be a good time to create a master list of all the family chores. Allow children to negotiate with each other so that, when appropriate, they are able to do the chores that best fit them.
- 7. Stay with it.** Most families get organized with chores only to have the system fall apart when the season, semester, and meeting schedules change. That is OK! Just pick up and start again.

Teaching children to take ownership of family life by doing chores is a critical part of their overall development. Parents who persevere in this area will experience the rewards of a family that is learning to work together. This will produce more satisfying family life now, and will also develop children who will be better-adjusted and more responsible adults for their own families.