

## Chores and Our Youngest Children

**Tip**—Having toddlers and preschoolers help with household tasks increases skills and self-esteem.

As Parenting Press author Shari Steelsmith recalls, "When my son was 2, I wondered if it was too early to expect him to help. It seemed that he arrived in this world absolutely opposed to putting away toys of any kind and responded to my teaching by screaming and hiding. By contrast, my two nieces, ages 4 and 2 at the time, promptly put away any toys when asked. It was a bit depressing.



"My son was, however, normal for his age. According to parent educator Elizabeth Crary, most children pick up their toys and things with help by age 4, with reminders at age 8, and will not do it reliably alone until age 12. (See page 51 in *Pick Up Your Socks . . . and Other Skills Growing Children Need!* for a terrific chart of average ages children do certain chores.)



"Since toys were such an issue with my son, I looked for other ways he could help around the house."

Parents typically do most everything for young children largely because they can't do a lot themselves yet and because it's so much easier and faster.

"Parent educator Kathryn Kvols points out that it behooves us, however, to look for ways to have our youngest ones participate in chores. They need to be given some responsibility for tasks that benefit the whole family, not just themselves. In this way they can learn that if you are a member of the family, then you pitch in and help the family function. A preschooler who helps set the table can see that he is contributing to the family meal and well-being. He can see that his contribution made a difference. Self-esteem grows this way."



**Tools**—Kvols lists a surprising number of ways in which children as young as 18 months old can help with common household tasks. Once you start thinking this way, you will be able to identify other things your young children can do to help the family function and thrive.

### 18 months-to-3 years old

- Turn off lights while being carried.
- Put diaper in the diaper pail.
- Wash vegetables; tear lettuce.
- Help set the table.
- Help feed/water pets.
- Carry in light groceries.
- Help make beds.
- Put items in recycling bin.
- Take clothes out of dryer.
- Seal and stamp envelopes.
- Run simple errands around the house.

### 4-6 years old

- Everything at left, plus more:
- Fold towels and wash cloths.
  - Water plants.
  - Help find items at the grocery store.
  - Sort light and dark laundry.
  - Dust.
  - Rake leaves for short periods of time.
  - Help wash the floor.
  - Put dishes in the dishwasher.
  - Haul things in the wagon.
  - Carry in firewood.

You'll find more practical tips you can use right now in *Pick Up Your Socks . . . and Other Skills Growing Children Need!* by Elizabeth Crary, M.S. and *Redirecting Children's Behavior* by Kathryn J. Kvols.

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