

RAISING KIDS

How to Turn Mundane Chores Into Mindful Moments for Our Kids

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We could all use a little bit of help around the house, right? It seems that children these days are too busy with homework, after school activities, and electronics to do any chores. In fact, unlike prior generations, most American parents today do not believe that their children should have to be responsible for household chores. According to a survey by Braun Research in 2014, 82 percent of adults polled said they had regular chores when they were growing up, but only 28 percent asked their children to do any. This is unfortunate because when children help out with such tasks, the entire family benefits. Parents are less irritated and stressed when we have some of our responsibilities lifted, and our children thrive in so many ways.

When children take on tasks such as making their bed or setting the table they feel a sense of pride and accomplishment. Encouraging children to participate in regular, age-appropriate chores has been associated with social, emotional, and academic benefits that help them succeed throughout life. Studies show that children who start doing chores as early as three years old become more self-sufficient, independent, confident, and responsible. Chores also give kids a chance to learn how things work around the house and create many opportunities for family bonding.

When it comes to identifying the benefits of children taking on chores, Marty Rossmann of the University of Mississippi is often quoted for her work in this area. After analyzing over 25 years of data, she determined that children who started doing chores beginning at age three or four were more likely to be well-adjusted, have better relationships with friends and family, and be more successful in their careers. In addition, the chores taught children about the importance of contributing to their family and developed their sense of empathy as adults.

Rossmann also discovered that the way in which chores are presented can impact a child's ability to become a well-adjusted adult. She recommends the following tips: tasks should not be too overwhelming, parents should present chores in a way that fits their child's preferred learning style, and children should help choose which chores they do through family meetings and a weekly chore chart. She does not think a financial allowance is a good idea, but this is a controversial topic with many perspectives that parents can explore. Finally, the earlier parents begin getting children to take an active role in helping out at home, the easier it will be to get them involved as they get older.

Add mindfulness

Another way that we can make chores a special experience for our kids is to incorporate mindfulness into the tasks that might otherwise seem repetitive or boring. Mindfulness has become a hot topic in recent years, with science demonstrating how being mindful can improve our lives. Mindfulness is the act of focusing on the moment at hand in a non-judgmental way. Study after study indicate how mindfulness improves our health because it relaxes us and reduces stress and anxiety. It allows us to quiet the endless distracting chatter of our mind so we can focus on the current moment. Furthermore, when we experience mindfulness, we connect with our inner thoughts and feelings so we can make calm, positive decisions.

Many experts suggest that we add mindfulness into everyday tasks, so what better way to show your kids how to get their mindfulness on than during some simple household chores? Mindful chores will help bring focus, attention, and sensory exploration to basic tasks like washing the dishes. Interestingly, research published in Mindfulness Magazine in 2015 found that dishwashers who looked at their task in a mindful way showed more positive attributes (e.g., inspiration) and less negative attributes (e.g., anxiety).

Essentially, we can show our kids how to use the time spent doing chores as a mini meditative session to promote mindfulness. The key is for them to focus on what they are doing and to notice all the sensations and feelings they experience. Make it into a fun "noticing game" for them.

Here are some questions to train them to ask themselves while working on their chores:

- What colors do you see?
- How does what you are doing feel? Does it feel soft or hard, wet or dry, smooth or rough?
- What do you smell? Do you like the smell?
- What sounds do you hear?
- How does this activity make you feel? Happy, sad, frustrated, excited, proud?
- What thoughts are you having while you complete the task?

Start simple

Your children will be ready to take on certain types of chores depending on their age. Start simple with something pertaining to their own personal care like brushing teeth. Instead of fighting you, they will now have an activity to focus their attention. In order for your children to really experience mindful teeth brushing, they should slow down and not rush through this typically boring chore. Encourage them to appreciate the many sensations they feel at each step. You can guide them by asking some easy questions:

- How does the toothbrush feel in your hand? How does it look?
- What does it feel like to squeeze the toothpaste onto your toothbrush?
- How does the toothpaste smell?
- How do the bristles feel in your mouth? On your tongue, teeth, and gums?
- What does the toothpaste taste like?
- How does your mouth feel differently after brushing your teeth?

Another important chore to ask your children to do is to make their bed every morning. It only takes a minute, but it can set the tone for their day because it creates a tidy and organized environment that will help them feel calm. Add some interest to this chore by asking them how the sheets and blanket feel.

The next time you ask your children to set or clear the dinner table, turn it into a mindful event for them. Ask them to focus carefully when they hold each object so they don't drop it. Also, ask them the following questions:

- How heavy does each cup, plate, bowl, spoon, knife, fork, and napkin feel in your hand?
- Are the objects smooth or rough, hard or soft?
- What sounds do you hear when you place each object on the table?
- What colors and patterns do you see?
- What do the plates smell like as you clear them off the table?

Other typical chores for children include folding laundry, cleaning their room and playroom, wiping down the table, light vacuuming or cleaning up with a dust buster, and taking care of pets. Each of these tasks can easily be transformed into a relaxing, introspective time with a little mindfulness magic.

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I love the idea of incorporating mindfulness at an early age. Most of us are just discovering how important being present is-- what a gift to give our kids while also teaching them responsibility.

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