

Giving the Gift of Chores

If assigning chores makes you pause with a 'should I' and a 'could I', rest assured the answer is a resounding yes. Chores are a statement of respect and love. When we show a child how to perform a chore, and set the expectation that they will follow through with it on a regular basis, we offer a sustaining gift that will aid a child throughout their whole life, in ways seen and unseen. Children, especially Montessorians, are prepared to work. They are born ready for observation and action, wanting to be like us, and yearning for independence. Chores offer children help along the way.

Who? Even the youngest of Montessori children practice the tasks of daily living. From the very first week, they set their lunch box on the shelf, hang their jacket, and change their shoes as much by their own efforts as possible. At school, we call these simple tasks the exercises of Practical Life. As the children grow, so too does the complexity and length of their tasks. All Primary children are capable and ready to learn a chore and follow it through, whether entirely independently or with a little support now and then.

What? Chores, like Practical Life, are the regular task of daily living. For younger children brief, everyday tasks connected to their routine are the best.

Older children may be encouraged to complete tasks that are spaced out, either once or a few times a week. As Primary children's awareness of time is yet to settle, these tasks will need extra support. Draw up a simple calendar of the week, and create a row for chores. Each morning take a moment to note the day of the week, and read through it. If the day's additional chore is one for later in the day, gently prompt your child at the beginning of evening chore time. "Remind me what's on our chore list today?"

Where? Most chores will have a clear place in your home or garden. A few chores are more mobile, like writing the weekly menu or making a thank you card. Introduce a chore that can move around in a place you like to do it. Next time, ask your child where they would like to do it.

When? Routine will help foster consistency and allow children to feel in charge of their chores. Try to introduce the chore at the overall time of day you would like to see it continued, so the child feels its place in the daily rhythm. Note sequences: "I like to clear the dishwasher before breakfast. It helps to have an empty dishwasher when its time to put our breakfast dishes away."

Which? While all chores can be collaborative, many are best suited to independent work. Welcome your child to have responsibility for both kinds. See the attached article *Working Towards Responsibility* for a list of age appropriate chores.

How? Each chore has a process with a clear beginning, middle and end. We take out the materials, we do the work, we tidy up. Each also has points of interest that will help a child remember the steps. Before introducing the chore, practice it yourself while thinking about the steps involved. When introducing the task, tell your child what you are going to show them, then slowly and purposefully demonstrate the precise series of movements needed to complete it.

For example, when we introduce sweeping, we collect the broom, the dust pan and brush. We sweep the dust and debris into a small pile. We set the broom down and pick up the dust pan and brush. We set the blade of the dustpan beside the pile, and tilt

it the back up. Holding the pan on an angle, we brush the debris into the pan. We may rest the brush over the blade to keep the debris from falling. We stand and walk to the receptacle and carefully pour the debris into it. Then we put our tools away and wash hands.

The small pile, titling the pan, holding the brush against the blade while walking and carefully pouring all the dirt into the compost are all points of interest.

Why?

When we guide a child through the process of completing a chore, we offer knowledge in a moment of connection, creating a memory to sustain both the child's growing independence and our mutual respect and affection. We offer responsibility and ways to contribute to our home community. Practicing these tasks deepens the child's self-discipline and nourishes self-esteem, at the same time as developing co-ordination and control of movement, and above all their concentration.

Once practicing chores becomes a rhythmic and repetitive process, it opens the mind up for creative and philosophical thinking. We dream, we solve problems, we have a rich inner life as we sweep leaves from the deck, buff the mirror till it shines, cleanse the counters. Truly, chores are a gift.