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Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life.

Children and Chores¹

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Recently when a friend was grocery shopping, he sent his twelve-year-old daughter in search of a list of items they needed. She dashed off happily, returned a few minutes later, and masterfully loaded her goods in the cart, her job complete.

This story reminded me of how much children of all ages are capable of when given the chance.

Children who have regular household jobs not only help keep the family home running smoothly, but also learn responsibility and the skills they will need for their own homes. There are several steps parents can take to make the process work for everyone. First, make chores part of the child's routine so that their jobs are done at regular times. A list of chores can help children remember, and so can a simple reminder like, "It's trash time."

Also, teach the child how to do the job by showing and explaining how it's done. Experts advise parents to start early in assigning children their own chores based on what they can do at certain ages, and, of course, with safety considerations in mind, too. Show your children what to do first, let them try while you watch, then let them go to it on their own. Even children as young as two can help by putting away toys, and

three-year-olds can help set the table. At older ages, children are capable of feeding pets, sweeping, vacuuming, loading the dishwasher, clearing the table, emptying wastebaskets, and helping to prepare dinner. As the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services points out, "Don't underestimate your children! The same child who runs a complicated computer game can certainly manage the washer and dryer!" (Pantley, 2006, ¶ 5).

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