

Including Your Child In and Practicing Daily Activities and Chores During COVID 19

During these challenging times, it is beneficial to keep children engaged in meaningful activities. Children may find it easier if the usual daily routines are followed as much as possible and new routines are established for any changes that occur as a result of current events. Of course, it is necessary for parents to keep the household functioning and that means the chores still need done!

It may be helpful as your children are at home to have them engaged in activities throughout the day. This could include involving them in the daily household routines and chores. You can start as small as preparing a snack or you can be more ambitious by using more complex chores such as doing the laundry. Because you know your child, you can determine how much and how your child will participate.

Some tips for getting started:

- **Start with activities your child enjoys.** If the activity has value to the child, it will be easier to get them to participate. Making a preferred snack or meal might be a starting point for some children. Yard work may be the ticket if they enjoy the outdoors. Fun makes everything easier!
- **Consider the things your child can already do.** Start by encouraging your child to do things that are already easy for them. It is always best to start with success!
- **Start with only one or two chores.** Slowly introduce more activities or chores as your child demonstrates success.
- **Start with activities and chores that are brief.** This will allow them to learn to be successful right away.
- **Make the outcome worth it:**
If completing a chore or a step of a chore results in something good, the child will be more likely to do it the next time they are asked. Make sure that completing chores or activities results in good things happening! Providing a positive consequence after the child does something that leads to the behavior occurring more often is known as reinforcement. Reinforcement is effective because it becomes predictable that things will get better for the child after they engage in the behavior.
- **Here are some guidelines on using reinforcement effectively:**
 - Reinforcement needs to be valuable to your child. Keep in mind that what is valuable at one moment of time may not be relevant at another time. For instance, a snack may be a valuable reinforcer when the child is hungry, but may not serve as reinforcement after the child has eaten a large meal. There is a wide range of things that might reinforce behavior but they have to be valuable to the child and be delivered immediately after the expected behavior occurs.
 - The reinforcer will need to be delivered by the adult. It is best if it is not something the child can access on their own. Examples of things adults can control include a small snack, praise, access to computer/tablet/phone, or toy.

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- The amount and quality of reinforcement should match the effort for the child required to complete the task. The harder the chore, the better the result.
- Reinforcement will likely work better if you deliver it with enthusiasm. The child will likely enjoy having the adult be part of the reinforcement!
- Reinforcement may not always have to be unrelated to the task. For example, preparing a snack, leads to eating it. Although many tasks will, at first, require the adult to deliver some unrelated but valuable reinforcer, eventually the child will learn that doing the task is fun. At that point, other reinforcers will no longer be needed.
- If the activity or chore is not something the child likes, then think about how to increase the value of completing the activity. For example, you may say, “Let’s go pick up the toys so we can watch the movie” (if watching movie is valuable). Because some children may not comprehend those directions, an alternative way of making the activity valuable might be needed. One way would be to simply hold up something of value as you show the child what you want them to do. For example, while holding up a tablet with a movie on the screen on pause, give a simplified direction by gesturing to a few toys scattered on the floor and say, “clean up”. Make sure the child can see what you are holding. This is known as use of a “promise reinforcer”. The technique shows the child what is promised if they do the right thing!
- Depending on your child, you may need to provide reinforcement as the child completes small steps. In other cases, the child may be able to complete the entire task before you provide reinforcement.
- **Plan for when you will do the activity:** While having a structured schedule and specific times may be ideal, a highly structured time-based schedule may not be possible. Building a routine and a set sequence of events may help make life more predictable for your child. For example, if the chore is making the bed, you can arrange for the activity to occur after breakfast every day. While this may occur at a different time each day, it will happen in the same order.
- **Before presenting each activity:** Give the direction and state what you want the child to do: “Let’s make the bed” (for activities you do with your child) or “make the bed” (for activities you are having them do independently). Phase your directions in short phrases or sentences. Use words that state what the child is to do.
- **For chores and activities they can already do:**
 - Follow guidelines above
- **For chores they cannot do independently but that you would like participation in some way:**
 - Identify what parts of the activity the child can do on his/her own. Have the child complete those steps with you. For example, your child may not be able to fold clothes, but you can have them hand you each piece from the laundry pile.

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- For all activities that you do together, talk to your child! Provide a language-enriched environment. You can talk about what you are doing in language they can understand. In other words, narrate or comment on things that are happening or that your child is doing. Use descriptive language. Pause often and allow your child to respond.
- Practice some of the skills they have recently learned while doing routine activities. For example, if they just learned how to label (tact) “sock” you may ask, “What is it?” as you show the socks before you fold them. However, you want to be careful not to ask too many questions. Asking many questions may turn a fun activity into a long series of demands. You want to have a balance of narration or comments and questions or directions.
- **For chores and activities you would like to see your child complete:**
 - Click on this link for guidelines on [Having Your Child Complete Independent Activities](#)

Enjoy completing chores and watching them do things on their own!