

Working Together

What if you have to move a heavy desk from one room to another all by yourself? More than likely, you will not be able to move it. You can try hard and give it all your energy. But you may end up feeling as if you have gotten nowhere.

Now, what if others are helping you? Each person takes a side, and together you move the desk easily. All of you are pleased that you finished the job quickly. The group might even decide to celebrate a job well done!

As you think about your family chores, ask these questions: Are you a one-person cleaning crew? Do you feel like you're doing everything by yourself? Do you push and nag other family members, but get no results? What if the family could work together to get jobs done more quickly?

The following ideas will help your family work together to get chores and jobs done around the house. If your family members already work together, you may get some new ideas.

How can you work together?

- 1. Talk to family members at any other time than when the problem is happening. Call a family meeting.**

What if you talk to family members while the problem is happening? You and others will probably get upset. For example, suppose that you are angry that your children do not pick up their clothes. If you argue with them when you walk into their room and see clothes all over the floor, it will probably backfire.

If you raise your voice, your children may shout back, "You're always yelling at us! This is our room!" A different plan is to ask for a time to talk later about the issue. You can say, "I have a problem that I need your help with. Can we call a family meeting and talk at 3:00 this afternoon in the living room?"

2. At the family meeting, involve all family members (including young children) who are part of the problem in order to solve the problem.

Ask all family members to meet to talk about the issue. Even very young children will learn that they are part of the family and that their ideas matter.

Go to the place you have chosen at the set time. At first, you might have to remind the children or other family members that it is time to meet. “Remember when I stopped by your room this morning? We agreed to meet this afternoon.” The more you meet, the more the family meetings will become part of your family’s routine.

At your meeting, tell what the problem is. Ask for everyone’s input. Then decide who will do what and by when. For example:

Parent: “I get very upset when you leave clothes all over your room. I don’t like yelling, and I don’t like it when we are mad at each other.”

Children: “We don’t like you yelling at us either.”

Parent: “What can we do to work together?”

Children: “We’ll put the clothes away in the mornings, right after we get up.”

Give the children some time to come up with a way to solve the problem. If they can’t think of anything, offer a couple of choices that you can live with.

Parent: “Do you want me to set a timer for 10 minutes each afternoon, and you put your clothes away then? Or, do I not say anything in the afternoons, and you can have until dinner to put them away? If you haven’t put them away by then, I can remind you once.”

Note:

Let family members choose the jobs they will do. You may have to assign some jobs that no one wants to do. Do not divide jobs into male and female tasks. Family members need to learn many different skills. From time to time, you can switch chores, especially those chores that no one wants to do.

3. Make and use pictures or visuals to remind people of the plan.

A new plan for jobs and chores may be hard to remember. At your meeting, decide how family members will remember to do their tasks. Should someone remind another person? Can there be a timer or a chart to help? (See the “Weekly Reminder” chart for an example.)

If the children decide to use a timer to put their clothes away, they can see how much time they have left and hear the timer when it goes off. If they decide they have until dinner to put clothes away, they might cut out magazine pictures of clothes and someone eating. They can hang the pictures in their room to remind them.

4. Show family members what to do. Then give them time to practice and change.

Don't expect children to be perfect. Parents could easily do some jobs better and faster by themselves. When they do, however, the children don't get helpful on-the-job training. Remember that what is easy for you may not be easy for your children. You may have done the task “a thousand times,” but they may be doing a new job. They need you to help and direct them.

New habits are sometimes hard to learn. People do not change overnight. Suppose you had a cook, a gardener, someone doing your laundry, and a driver. Then suppose that they were all taken away from you. You might be angry and upset at having to do all of the jobs yourself. Also, you might not know how to do the jobs.

5. Try the plan for a set time. Then come back together and evaluate the plan. Decide if it is a good plan.

Try the plan for a week. If the children choose to put clothes away in the mornings, let them try it on their own. Come back again for a meeting and see how things worked. You might find that it is hard to get things done in the mornings, and the clothes are not getting picked up.

At the next family meeting, talk about the past week. Try to find new ways to solve the problem. Get everyone's input.

Parent: "I'm still upset because we're so busy in the mornings that you don't have time to pick up your clothes. I think we need to try something else." You can ask if the children have other ideas or offer some yourself.

As a family, decide on a new plan, and try it for a week. Then meet again and evaluate the new plan.

6. Decide on consequences, and follow through on decisions.

Make sure you follow through with whatever plans the family members decide on. Agree on when certain jobs will be done—before breakfast, after school, on Saturdays. Set time limits, and decide as a family what will happen if the chores are not finished. Children should have some say in when and how quickly they will do their tasks.

Children need to know the positive and negative consequences of what they do. What are the good or bad results if they do their tasks or don't do them? Family values and goals will help you decide what the consequences will be.

Some parents think that they should pay or reward children for doing household tasks. Other parents feel that children should do chores without pay because they should help out, cooperate, and learn to be responsible. Still others believe that not all jobs are enjoyable, but they need to be done anyway because they help everyone (like cleaning the house).

Here is an example of giving consequences: “If you don’t clean up within 45 minutes after a meal, you won’t get to watch TV for the night.”

7. Celebrate and have fun!

Make sure that all family members have time to enjoy their own interests. You need time for yourself, and your children need time for themselves. That’s why families need to share tasks. Working together will give family members more time for family activities and more time to meet their own goals.

Celebrate what you do! You can have a picnic in the backyard or work on a puzzle together. You can take a walk in the woods or watch a movie. Decide what to do as a family, and have fun!

Ideas for Making Jobs Easier

Job Bag

Keep a paper bag on the counter, and fill it with slips of paper with a job written on each slip. Each person pulls a slip from the bag every day and does that chore. Or, each weekend, every person takes 3 slips and finishes them by the end of the day. You can write some silly jobs on the slips too. For example: “Sing your favorite song” or “Go outside and smell the flowers.”

Job Envelopes

Put each person’s name or picture on an envelope. Put a slip of paper with a job written on it into each one. Each family member checks the envelope and finds his or her job. Envelopes might work well if stepchildren come and go at different times. All children will feel like part of the family. And they will have a place for finding their jobs during the time that they are with you.

Split Shopping Lists

During a family meeting, have each person decide on a meal for the next week. Make up a shopping list with all the ingredients needed. At the store, split up the list. Have people shop for items on their lists and then meet at the checkout.

Split a list at the store, and see if everyone can find all of his or her items in 15 minutes.

Even young children can help you find items at the store. Cut out labels or pictures at home. Give children a label and ask them to help you find the item on the shelf.

Make Jobs a Game

If clothes are on the floor, make it a game for the kids to pick them up. Put the hamper or basket in the center of the floor. Have the kids “shoot” clothes into the basket for “two points.”

Add Humor

Humor makes jobs go much faster. People often get along better and work harder when they can laugh at the same time. One idea is to sing while doing chores. With young children, form a line from the table to the sink to clear dishes. Pass the dishes along and sing silly songs.

Set up a Work Plan

As a family, list chores that must be done both inside and outside the house. Tell exactly what needs to be done (for example: cut grass, pull weeds, wash dishes, sweep kitchen floor). Decide which jobs must be done daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly. Are there some tasks being done more often than they need to be? If so, decide how to handle these tasks in the future. (For example, see the “Household Tasks” chart.)

Weekly Reminder for the Week of October 5

To-Do List	Meetings and Activities	Meal Planning	Shopping
Take clothes to cleaners -- Mom	Oct. 5 10:00 a.m. Mom at school	Thursday—pork chops Mom starts	milk <u>on sale</u> bread soup
Dusting this week -- Mary	Oct. 8 4:00 p.m. Dad at dentist	Friday—Tacos Tom starts	napkins detergent
Make bed -- Tom	Wed., 6:00 p.m. Mary at choir practice	Saturday A.M.— Mary takes chicken out of freezer	

1. To-Do List

- List chores or tasks not done routinely. Tell who is to do them.
- Note a change in tasks (when someone different is to do a task).
- Give a reminder if someone keeps forgetting a routine task.

2. Meetings and Activities

- List everyone's activities and meetings.
- Put down dentist or doctor appointments.
- Have each person add his or her activities.

3. Meal Planning

- Write down the planned meal.
- Write down who will start or prepare it.
- List other reminders (for example: take food from freezer, buy certain ingredients).

4. Shopping

- Mark specials and where they are.
- Keep track of items you need or use all the time.

Household Tasks

Tasks	Who	How Often	Time
Kitchen and Dining Room			
Prepare supper			
Set table			
Clear table			
Wash dishes			
Load dishwasher			
Dry dishes and put them away			
Wipe table			
Wipe counters			
Clean cabinets			
Sweep floor			
Mop floor			
Living Room and Family Room			
Pick up belongings			
Straighten tables			
Recycle old magazines and newspapers			
Dust			
Vacuum			
Bathrooms			
Scrub tub			
Scrub sink and counters			
Clean toilet			
Wash floors			

Tasks	Who	How Often	Time
Laundry			
Sort clothes			
Wash clothes			
Dry clothes			
Fold clothes			
Iron clothes			
Put clothes away			
Other			
Wash windows			
Clean out garage			
Take out trash			
Pay bills			
File taxes			
Plan fun events			
Select gifts			
Change diapers			
Bathe children			
Outside work			
Wash car			
Sweep walk and driveway			
Pull weeds			
Water flowers and trees			
Water grass			
Cut grass			
Trim shrubs			
Rake leaves			
Paint fence/house			

Resources

Lott, Lynn, and Intner, Riki. *The Family That Works Together...Turning Family Chores from Drudgery to Fun*. Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1995.

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References

Lott, Lynn, and Intner, Riki. *The Family That Works Together...Turning Family Chores from Drudgery to Fun*. Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1995.

McGarvey, Suzanne, and Clark, Jan. *Family Councils: The Key is Communication* (GH6641). University of Missouri-Columbia: University Extension 1-800-292-0969, 1997.

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