

MIND in the Making

The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR LEARNING

Doing Chores

Promoting the Life Skill of Self-Directed, Engaged Learning in School Age Children
Five Strategies That Work in Moving from Managing Children's Behavior to Promoting Life Skills

Question: My daughter can't seem to get her chores done without us nagging her. How can we avoid this daily battle?

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that engaging in regular household chores is good because it promotes a sense of responsibility in the child and helps her feel as though she is an essential part of the family.

Helping children to become increasingly accountable for their learning and actions is an important component of helping children to become self-directed, engaged learners. We can help children by:

- 1. Explaining why the chore is important.** Talk with your child to clearly define the what, when, where and why of the tasks involved in the chore(s). You can help her have a greater appreciation for the task by explaining why it needs to be done. For example:
 - "Please put your dirty clothes in the laundry basket so I don't have to look all over the house to find them."
 - "We need to wipe up the crumbs on the table so we don't get bugs."

Your child will be more cooperative if you leave a little room for her to innovate the "how" in carrying out the task.

- 2. Catching children doing positive things.** Acknowledge your child's successes in carrying out her chores. For example:
 - "You did everything we agreed upon without any reminders. Thank you."
 - "The table looks so clean. I can tell you took the time to do your job well."

Carol Dweck of Stanford University found that adults who praise children for their personality ("you are smart," "you are so talented") develop what she calls a *fixed mindset*. They begin to believe that these characteristics are inborn and can't be changed. As a result, they want to hold on to these labels and become less willing to try things that are hard where they might not seem as smart. On the other hand, children who are praised for their effort ("you tried so hard") or their strategies ("you figured out how to put your sock on by yourself") develop a *growth mindset* where they see their abilities and intelligence as something that can be changed. Children who have a growth mindset are more likely to try hard in the face of challenges.

3. **Praising effort or strategies, not intelligence.** Praise your child for her genuine effort and the strategies she used in approaching her chores.
 - “You figured out how many forks to put on the table by counting how many people are here!”
4. **Giving children freedom to make mistakes and learning from them.** Children may not complete chores in the most efficient or accurate manner. Help them learn from their mistakes. You can ask questions to help your child learn. For example:
 - “What can you do differently next time?”
 - “What went well? What could have been better?”
5. **Giving children time to help teach and learn from each other.** When possible, let your child teach younger siblings and other family members how to perform their household tasks or demonstrate her strategies for doing a job well.

These five strategies will promote the life skill of Self-Directed, Engaged Learning and move from managing children’s behavior to promoting life skills in fun and doable ways.

Self-Directed, Engaged Learning: It is through learning that we can realize our potential. As the world changes, so can we, for as long as we live—as long as we learn.

Mind in the Making (MITM), at The Bezos Family Foundation, is an unprecedented effort to share the science of children’s learning with the general public, families and professionals who work with them. Based on *Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs* (HarperCollins, 2010) by Ellen Galinsky, Chief Science Officer at The Bezos Family Foundation, its mission is to promote Executive Function life skills in adults and through them in children in order to keep the fire for learning burning brightly in all of us.

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