

Introduction

With so many parents working two jobs - or more - and kids involved in so many activities, families are often pulled in many directions. Simply getting the household chores done can be difficult, especially if you have young children or children who don't always want to do chores or help Mom and Dad (and really, what kid does?). With a few key strategies, this can be a lot easier.

Make a schedule and stick to it

This is probably the single *most* important thing you can do to help your household run smoothly. Children feel much more secure when they know what is coming each day and you as the parent will often find that you get more done. Even if you already have a schedule, it never hurts to refine it and re-evaluate your time. If you finish anything ahead of schedule, do something fun with your kids until it's time for the next thing. Breaking things down (such as chores and playtime) into blocks of about two hours each ensures that everyone has ample time to do what they are required to do while at the same time keeping things from getting too boring. If your days are taken up with work and school, you can still schedule the time you are at home to make sure that everything gets done. That way, you can ensure you have time for what is really important.

Use Visual Success Tools

Children learn and perform better when they have a visual aid and can see their success. Making jars with their names on them and adding stones, marbles, large colorful buttons or anything fun when they have achieved a goal is a great way to show their progress and keep them motivated. They really respond to the immediate reward of placing a stone in their jar and it is a great way to teach them about long-term consequences for their behavior. So for instance, if they have done all their chores and followed the schedule all day with minimal issues, they have earned a stone for that day. If they have earned a stone or marble at the end of every day for a week (for younger kids, maybe just four stones for the week; this can be difficult for younger children and you want it to be something to motivate them, not set them up to fail), they can go out for ice cream on Sunday or have a pancake party as their reward. It is important to explain to them very clearly why they are being rewarded and it is just as important to explain why they are not being rewarded.

Implement A Warning System

The "three strikes and you're out" rule works well, no matter what style of discipline you use. Reinforcement and consistency are the keys to successful discipline. Letting a child know absolutely what is coming next is a great tool when trying to curb a problem behavior. If you can say to your child, "One more warning and you will be going to bed early tonight" and your child knows you mean it, you have a much better chance of them taking you seriously. You must back up the warnings, though. They are warnings, not threats, because you are telling the child what *will* happen if they do not stop their behavior. If they go the entire day without more than two warnings, they can get a stone in their jar.

Create A "Points Store"

A great way to add incentive for your child to follow the schedule and do their chores is to add a points system. This can be set up any way you choose: you can award points for doing chores, or for behavior above and beyond what is expected, or for kindness and responsible behavior... the list is really endless. The points are tallied up at the end of the week and the child can use them to "buy" things in the point store. These can be things like candy, chips, DVDs or video games or anything at all that they like. Even if you don't have a lot of money to spend on stocking your kids' points store, you can put coupons for things in the store, such as "One extra hour of computer time" and "One chore-free day." This teaches children about earning things. It can also teach them about saving, if there is a big-ticket item they must save their over a few weeks points to get.

Reinforce, Reinforce, Reinforce

Consistency is the number one most important thing when it comes to children. Inconsistency creates confusion. If they know every single day what is expected from them, they will eventually get with the program. It's hard but if you give in just once, if you do not correct them immediately or if you do not follow through with what you have said even one time, you are creating a recipe for failure. It sounds cliché but children truly do crave structure and rules and they depend on their parents to give these things to them. Children's thinking is very black and white and they feel more secure when the rules are simple, too. When they can see that there is a very clear difference between what is OK and what is not OK, they are happier and better-behaved.

Children often act out because of confusion or frustration; they may be confused about concepts and expectations that you think you have explained very clearly. You can cut down on their frustration or confusion (and yours!) by making things very clear and simple. You can print out your schedule, make a chore chart, create a points spreadsheet and do many other things to help your kids feel involved. When the family works together, it works better. This pamphlet has basic outlines of ideas that you can tailor to your family's needs.

Schedule

As stated in the introduction, a schedule is probably the single *most* important thing you can do to help your household run smoothly. Children feel much more secure when they know what is coming each day and you as the parent will often find that you get more done. The reason for this is that so much time is taken up simply figuring out what needs to be done and then delegating the chores out. Often, parents are so busy during the week that the weekends are a whirlwind of trying to get things done and there is simply not enough time. If chores can be broken down and delegated beforehand, it saves time and makes everything much easier.

I am a stay-at-home mother with some children in school and some at home. This puts me at an advantage in some ways and a disadvantage in other. I have an advantage because there is more time for cleaning, laundry and to cook family meals. It is a disadvantage because someone is always here, which means there is always a mess and always someone to cook for. When we implemented the schedule, I was shocked by how much less stressed out I was. I wasn't having to constantly yell at the kids or pick up after them and my house wasn't a disaster area anymore. They are much better-behaved now; I can have a phone conversation with my mom and I can actually hear what she is saying because the kids are not screaming or fighting in the background. In fact, because of the Points System (which I will go into later) they actually volunteer to help out! They *want* to do their chores and they *want* to help out around the house.

Believe me, whether you work inside the home or outside it, you can create a schedule that works for you and your family.

Here is the schedule my family works off of during the school year:

- **6:30am:** Wake up kids for school
- **7:15am:** Take kids to the bus stop
- **9:00am:** Wake up Saul & give him breakfast
- **10:00am - 12:00pm:** Morning chores, walk dogs
- **12:00pm - 1:00pm:** Make and eat lunch
- **1:00pm - 2:30pm:** Take Saul outside to play
- **2:30pm:** Get kids off the bus
- **2:45 - 4:00pm:** Homework and chores
- **4:00pm:** Start dinner and get dishes washed
- **5:00pm - 7:00pm:** Cook dinner and evening chores
- **7:00pm:** Eat dinner
- **7:30pm:** Kids get showers
- **8:00pm - 9:00pm:** Relaxing/tv time, walk dogs
- **9:00pm:** Kids go to bed

As you see, most things are broken up into blocks of about 2 hours each. This is to ensure

that everybody has ample time to do what they are required to do but does not get bored doing it. Children are always walking around talking about how bored they are. When they can see what is coming next, you hear that a lot less.

Looking at the schedule, you can see there are “morning chores,” “after school chores” and “evening chores.” After school chores in our house are the kids’ chores. Morning and evening chores refer to the time allotted for my husband and I to do our chores, errands and anything else we need to do. If the kids finish their chores by 4:00pm, they can go outside to play until dinner time. If they do not finish their chores by 4:00pm, there is no play time. There is no bargaining and no discussion. If it is not done, they do not go outside. This is a hard rule but it is a fair one, because if the chores are kept up with every day, they should not take very long to do. The allotted time is more than enough if they are working as they should.

If everyone does what they are told, they can choose an hour of computer or tv time as a substitute for one of their hours outside but we insist they play outside at least part of the time unless it’s raining and we do not allow more than two hours of tv or computer time a day. They are happier and get more exercise that way.

The schedule my family works off of for the weekends and summertime is as follows:

10:00am: Everybody is awake by now
10:00am - 12:00pm: Playing outside, walk dogs
12:00pm: Make and eat lunch
1:00pm - 3:00pm: Weekend chores
3:00pm - 5:00pm: Playing outside
5:00pm: Start dinner
5:00pm - 7:00pm: Cooking dinner, life skills
7:00pm: Eat dinner
7:30pm: Kids get showers
8:00pm - 10:00pm: Relaxing/tv time walk dogs
10:00pm: Kids go to bed

The only real difference is that the kids don’t have to go to school and that I teach them Life Skills lessons on the weekends, which I will cover a little bit later. On Sunday, instead of relaxing time, we usually have a party to congratulate everybody who earned four or more stones for the week. If no one has earned four or more stones that week, then we don’t have a party. We make sure they understand why we are not having one and we encourage them to do better next week.

There are times when the schedule needs to be modified, such as if we have to go somewhere for a period of time, if someone is sick or some other exigent circumstance but we have noticed on the whole that the kids have responded amazingly well to the schedule, especially our son who is autistic. We sometimes find that we finish things far ahead of the schedule, so there is a lot of time for games and just general hanging out.

The key to the schedule is that it should make your life *less* stressful, not more stressful. If you feel too pressured by it, try revamping it and keep revamping it until it is workable for your family. It should help everybody feel accomplished and organized, not harried and frustrated. The most important thing is that it creates more time for your family to be together, doing whatever you like to do as a family.

Chores

Delegating chores is never fun. There are always those chores nobody wants to do, like dishes or cleaning out the cat box. However, it is important that everybody pull their own weight and children need to learn responsibility, as well as consequences. In our house, the heavier chores (like mopping) go to Mom and Dad. The kids' chores are age-appropriate and reflect the child's ability. Our weekday chore list looks like this:

Weekday Chores

Dad: Kitchen, dishes, laundry, garbage

Mom: Sweeping, mopping, general cleaning, cooking

Olivia (age 8): Living room, upstairs hallway, set table, feed dogs

Sara (age 6): Dining room, steps, clear table off

Ian (age 6 & autistic): Pick up downstairs toys and put shoes away

Saul (age 3): Help Ian

You'll notice for me it says "general cleaning." That is pretty much everything everybody else doesn't do or that I need to "help" with, such as the bathroom. I cook almost every meal from scratch and I don't use pre-packaged side dishes if I can possibly help it, so there is a lot cooking involved in our day-to-day lives.

Our weekend chore list looks like this:

Dad: Yard and outside things

Mom: General cleaning, laundry

Olivia: Bedroom, bathroom

Sara: Bedroom, help Dad

Ian: Help Dad

Saul: None

As you can see, the three year old gets no real chores because he is just too young. We do expect him to pick up after himself, though and he gets rewards for other things, such as going on the potty and being kind to others. On the weekends, the kids are responsible for their regular chores *and* their weekend chores. They have more time to do them and if

they have kept up with them, it should not take long at all.

The general rule is that chores have to be done by 4:00pm on the weekdays and 3:00pm on the weekends. Once school is out they have longer to do their chores and there is really no reason they should not be able to get them done. The main thing is that they do them and do them right so as to foster a feeling of contribution to the family and accomplishment for themselves. If you are having to continuously redo a chore after a child has done it or if the child is continuously doing it wrong, maybe that chore should be delegated to someone else until the child is ready for it.

Such as, I don't feel children under ten years old should fold laundry. I am going to have to re-fold most of it anyway, so an adult might as well do it in the first place. I feel the same way about dishes. We don't have a dishwasher and a child simply does not take the care necessary to clean the dishes well enough that we can eat off of them. Now, if your ten year old has demonstrated a proven ability to wash dishes correctly, then by all means have them do the dishes if you are comfortable with it. But having a child do a chore that they really are not capable of doing "so they will learn" only reinforces frustration and a negative attitude regarding chores in general. It is so much more productive to have them do what they are capable of doing. And there are plenty of other things to do!

The Warning System

How many times have you used the old countdown system on your child, like you are a time bomb that is about to go off? “Johnny! I’m giving you until the count of three to get down here or you are going to bed early! One... two...” It works a lot of the time, because children feel a sense of urgency when you are counting down. They know there is a limit and they can see the line very clearly. The Warning System takes this principle and applies it to discipline overall.

The basic concept here is that three warnings result in an early bedtime (EBT in our house), or whatever punishment you decide it should be. What we are essentially talking about is a three strikes rule. The "three strikes and you're out" rule works well, no matter what style of discipline you use. How you implement it is up to you; you can use three strikes and then give a warning, such as: “Sara [6 years old], I’ve told you twice now to pick up your shoes. If I have to tell you one more time, that’s your first (or second or third) warning.” In this instance, the child has more chances to correct their behavior before a warning is given. This is better for a younger child.

You can also use the warnings themselves as three strikes, with the third strike resulting in early bedtime, such as: “Caitlyn [15 years old], I’ve asked you twice to do the dishes. If I have to ask you again, you will get EBT.” We utilize the warnings both ways, depending on the age of the child. We have kids ranging from three years old to fifteen years old, so it really varies.

If a child has used up all three warnings for the day, has an EBT and is still not cooperating, you can take away privileges from the next day as well. This is a great way to teach your child about consequences and about long-term repercussions for their actions. You can say, “Sara, you already have three warnings and an early bedtime tonight. If I have to ask you one more time to stop running in the house, you will lose an hour of playtime tomorrow.” You could also give what we call Super-Early Bedtime, which means the child stays in their room from 3:00pm until the next morning. (We let them come down for dinner.) Super-Early Bedtime (or SBT in our house) works better with older children.

Timeouts and other forms of discipline can be used in conjunction with The Warning System as well. You might use a timeout before giving a warning as a way to help your child “reset his dials” and calm down. Or you can use a timeout and a warning together if your child has done something that you feel warrants a more severe punishment. In our house, there are certain things a child might do which will result in an automatic EBT no matter how many warnings they have. These things are clearly spelled out; the kids know what they are and exactly what the consequences are going to be. One of these things is deliberately destroying something, such as breaking it on purpose or drawing on furniture or walls. Another is causing injury to one of the other children, such as biting.

We do not allow bargaining or any way for the kids to “lose” one of their warnings once they get one but you might choose to do that if you like. We have chosen not to do this for a few reasons, the biggest being that in our opinion if there is a way to remove the warning, it loses it’s effectiveness as a tool. You could go back and forth all day like that, with the child getting a warning and then doing something “good” to have the warning dropped, only to catch another warning and repeat the same thing all over again. This would result in no real consequences for the child’s behavior and defeats the entire purpose. You are getting your children ready for the world outside your home and in the world outside our homes, we do not get endless chances to do the right thing. Children need to learn that.

One of the absolute best things you can do for you child is to teach them there are consequences for their behavior. People who do not learn that are often seriously handicapped as adults. It is very important to reiterate to your child that *they* are in charge of their own consequences. If they do not like the consequences they are ending up with, they need to change their behavior. This really cannot be said enough. Teaching them personal responsibility is another of the best things you could possibly do for them. When a child can take ownership of his or her own behavior, they realize that they are not helpless. This is empowering and very important.

Reinforcement and consistency are the keys to successful discipline. Letting a child know absolutely what is coming next is a great tool when trying to curb a problem behavior. If you can say to your child, "One more warning and you will be going to bed early tonight" and your child knows you mean it, you have a much better chance of them taking you seriously. You must back up the warnings, though. They are warnings, not threats, because you are telling the child what *will* happen if they do not stop their behavior. If they go the entire day without more than two warnings, they can get a stone in their jar.

Which takes us to the next thing: Visual Success Tools.

Visual Success Tools

Kids live in the moment. They need immediate correction and they love instant gratification. You can use this to your advantage and theirs. Children learn and perform better when they have a visual aid and can literally see their success. Making jars with their names on them and adding stones, marbles, large colorful buttons or anything fun when they have achieved a goal is a great way to show their progress and keep them motivated. They really respond to the immediate reward of placing a stone in their jar and again, it is a great way to teach them about long-term consequences for their behavior.

For instance, if they have done all their chores and followed the schedule all day with minimal issues, they have earned a stone for that day. In our house, for every day they do not get an EBT, they get a stone in their jar. If at the end of the week they have earned at least four stones, they can go participate in whatever activity we are doing as their reward. It is important to explain to them very clearly why they are being rewarded and it is just as important to explain why they are not being rewarded. For younger kids, the earning scale could be modified; this can be difficult for younger children and you want it to be something to motivate them, not set them up to fail.

In our house, we have some kind of party at the end of the week to congratulate everybody who earned four or more stones. If someone did not earn enough stones, they cannot participate in the party. This sometimes results in hurt feelings but it also motivates them to try harder next time. We have never had the same child miss the party two weeks in a row. They *want* to participate and they try to make sure they do. This again prepares them for the real world; in the real world, if you have not earned something, you don't get it. And they will feel so much prouder of themselves if they can *earn* it, rather than just have it handed to them. Our job as parents is to teach our children values and how to live as adults, not just to keep them safe and secure or give them whatever they want.

Another invaluable Visual Success Tool is The Points System.

The Points System

A great way to show your child their success while adding incentive for your child to follow the schedule and do their chores is to add a points system. This can be set up any way you choose: you can award points for doing chores, or for behavior above and beyond what is expected... the list is really endless. In our home, we award points for kindness and responsible behavior, or we will "auction" them, such as I will say, "OK, I am giving ten points to whoever picks up this living room." The change it has brought in the children is nothing short of amazing. They actually *ask* me to give them chores!

We use a points chart to keep track of all the points each child has earned every day. We use tally marks but you could use stars, or stickers or anything you want. In our home, each tally mark is worth five points. The points are counted up at the end of the week and the child can use them to "buy" things in the point store. These can be things like candy, chips, DVDs or video games, toys or anything at all that they might want. Even if you don't have a lot of money to spend on stocking your kids' points store, you can put coupons for things in the store, such as "One extra hour of computer time" and "One chore-free day." This teaches your children about earning things. It can also teach them about saving, if there is a big-ticket item they must save their points over a few weeks to get. We have put Transformers, Barbies, crayons and books in there, all to great success.

Here is an example of the points chart we use:

	Olivia	Jon	Sara	Saul				
Monday								
Tuesday								
Wednesday								
Thursday								
Friday								
Saturday								
Sunday								

Under each child's name, we tally all their points up. They love to see a mark under their name and they count their points up often to see how many they have and who has the most. They have a friendly competition about it and it really has been an invaluable tool. By the time "Points Store Day" comes, they are very excited and cannot wait to use the points they have earned. We set the store up on the table every Saturday.