

Giving Young Children Tasks Around the House Part 1

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06.7] ANNOUNCER: Next is Dr. Charlene Wrighton to discuss everything early education about your children or students in our new show, Ed. Talks with Dr. Char.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:21.4] CW: Hello, it's Dr. Char and today, I am going to speak on the topic of giving children tasks to do around the house. Now, this is a part one because the part two is going to be all about allowances. Quite honestly, I was going to do tasks and allowances in one radio show and there's just too much to say. I'm going to break it up into two parts. I'm really excited about the part two so I'm kind of sad that I can't do it today.

Just because I'm going to share ways that we've done it in our family that I felt like have been highly effective and also, ways that I have given a type of allowance to children like a reward. But really, more of an allowance to my children when I was teaching special education because then they would take that, whatever, it was gold coins or it was play money or whatever it was, carnival tickets, they could go to the store. It looks like a form of currency.

Anyway, I'm very excited about both of these topics. I think that they're so important. Part one is called, "Giving young children tasks around the house." I want to stress that I prefer the word task rather than chore. Chore has more than one meaning. A chore is something that you do like a task but you also know that the word chore means it's a chore, it's a hassle, it's a drudgery.

We don't want to plant that concept in the minds of children. We want our children to be strong workers capable, competent. We want to make sure that they don't have a negative connotation of doing a task or a chore at home. I'm going to use the word task. Now, I might use it interchangeably but I just prefer it because I feel like the task is, here is what I have to do. I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it well and I'm going to be done with it and I might have to do it again sometime.

But for that moment, I can check it off my list. Okay, I feel it is imperative, being the mother of three, being a grandmother of seven, being a school teacher forever, that children need to do chores at home and I think they need to do this at a very early age. I think you'll be very surprised to hear this, maybe you won't, maybe this is exactly how you have raised your children.

I think that first of all, if you start this, having children help, just by carrying things when they're a toddler, carrying a diaper, carrying a bottle, carrying a toy, carrying a book. Doing something for the dog or for the cat. They don't perceive it then as work, they perceive it as play or just participating in the day. They really will not recognize it as drudgery that I was talking about. As they grow and learn and you're extending their responsibilities.

[0:03:15.6] CW: Honestly, they won't notice the shift as much. They're also learning to be so competent at whatever they need to do that again, that alone takes the burden off the work aspect of it. We all know that doing home chores is not always fun and certainly, we would rather maybe pay someone to do it or have someone else do it. On the other hand, it is part of our daily life and it is a responsibility and there are very few people I can think of in the world that don't do chores or shouldn't do chores.

Maybe queen Elizabeth, yeah, who knows. Anyway, I feel like chore doing or completing tasks is very important. When you give children a task to complete, it gives them the feeling that they are a vital part of the family. They see mom and dad, grandma, grandpa, older siblings, scurrying around, doing tasks in the home and so it gives them a really important feeling about their own participation on the family.

It shifts the concept of "you wait on me because I'm a prince or princess and you're here to serve me" and instead, creates the concept of family, of pitching in. That is critical. Sadly, if parents don't expect children to do things earlier as they grow, they simply will not want to do it like for instance, if they don't have something to do at one or two, by the time they're three, they're going to be task resistant, you don't want that because if they're that task resistant at three, they're going to be that way at four and five and that's really difficult by that time to start trying to train a child to do chores or tasks at home.

Children need to have responsibilities. It's imperative in order for them to be, first of all, those strong resilient children that we keep talking about, also to develop skills that are so important. We can always

tell children who have tasks and chores at home, just by how they handle their lunch boxes and jackets. We have children of various ages who forget stuff, leave them behind, have to come back in or don't recognize their jacket or their lunch box and we have to get descriptions.

Again, those are all part of the training process and so we don't mind but it does tell us that they're not used to being responsible. Also, sometimes they want parents or grandparents to carry their stuff, they will literally toss the lunch pail or box and jacket or sweater on the floor or hand them to the parent as if they are incapable of walking out to the car with them. I'm a really strong believer that they need to do this.

This is their job. Certainly, if something's heavy, we'll help them but for something light like a sweater or a hat or a lunchbox. It's truly theirs to do. We're here to open up doors and assist them as needed.

[0:06:03.8] CW: We want to make sure that children don't grow up to be – have that stubborn feeling because there's nothing like preschool stubborn if you haven't seen it, it's a sight to behold because it just gets harder to then teach them skills and teach them to be responsible for things without a lot of badgering and cajoling and bribing.

It's really important to get this early so that they had such a part of their life experience that they're actually having fun with it. We can make these things fun. Which reminds me of my dad, he was the one that – he was like Tom Sawyer. If he wanted the kids to clean out the garage, he made it so much fun that we all wanted to do it.

It's that kind of family, bustling around the house and then we get to go do something fun once our chores are over. You know, building that in to the day, going to get ice cream or whatever it is, you know, just a reward, something fun at the end of the work day. Very often parents, they don't even think about their toddlers or preschoolers having a task to do. I think that parents may not be aware that children are very capable and if nothing else, if they're not capable of that moment which I do believe they are.

That's our job is to start small and help them grow, help them learn the skills because you're actually asking them to listen to directions, follow directions, use eye/hand coordination. Use their body for

moving things. You're really training them to be highly skilled which is going to transfer to so many other things in life.

[0:07:43.6] CW: It's imperative. I believe in starting as soon as they can crawl. It's interesting, again, I've talked about this subject and just a reminder. Children have receptive language. They have so many words and concept inside their brain that they fully understand, they may not speak it, they may not be able to form their thoughts into phrases or sentences yet.

Maybe they only have single words. But they absolutely know what it means to go get me a diaper, go get me a book, I'm going to read to you, go get me your bottle. It's over there. They understand that and they will follow, they'll do it. But we have to expect it, we have to give them these tasks so that they can grow and it is definitely a part of the everyday process. It's so important. We want to reinforce it by getting excited over the things that they can do because then they're going to want to do more.

If you don't ask them to do this, they're not even going to think about doing it potentially which means, you kind of have the cycle going. What we want to do is start early, the earlier the better. We want to begin with things that they are able to do and the one thing that they can do once they're up and walking is they can carry things from one point to another or they can go fetch something that is in sight or something they're familiar with.

If they know that they have a box or a bin full of books or toys, they know that it's there because they've been in it, they'll remember. Go get a diaper like I said earlier. Those kinds of things that they're fully capable of doing. That is really important that they actually do and we ask them because we're giving them a direction, it's building their vocabulary as we're using simple but full sentences.

[0:09:30.2] CW: We can repeat it and we can even help them if there is lack of understanding, that's just part of a whole process. Once they're able to walk, there are fun things that they can do once you've changed the diaper, they can walk it over to the trash can. They can walk it over to the diaper pail.

They can – I love this. This is straight from Montessori. Maria Montessori, hundred years ago, believed firmly that children would watch parents and want to do what they do and I think about all the money

that especially with my first born as a teacher, I was thinking of all the educational toys that I wanted to buy my son, my firstborn, and what he really wanted to do were the things that we were doing.

If dad was working on something, he wanted to be right there doing that too. If I was sweeping or vacuuming, he wanted to do that too. Whatever we were doing, he wanted to participate in. I remember my daughter, middle child. Literally by the time she was three, four and five years old would take things out of my hand and she would do this and I kind of found it a bit annoying at times or at first.

Because I wanted to get it done and I wanted to get it done fast. We, as parents have that – I've got so much to do, I don't have time to teach you or I don't have time to fiddle with this or I don't have time as you're taking too much time to do it or you're not doing it right, whatever it is, we get the sense of urgency and impatience.

[0:10:58.8] CW: And yet, children are very capable and wouldn't it be better to give them a chance at it and then go back later and either work with them and fix it or fix it quietly. Because soon as you're saying, it's not done proper, that's not done properly or I need to do it or I need to get this done and now you're rushing them.

Their feeling of I cannot – I'm not capable. You've already planted that seed and that seed first of all, it's planted in the soil of hurt, they are feeling hurt, they are feeling sad and they're feeling disengaged from you. They're feeling basically – it's a put down.

They're feeling like they're not capable or able and that is the last thing that you want to do with your child. I remember my mom as I was older, being a bit like that when she was trying to teach me to sew, I was a very fast moving child or if I were cooking, I would make a mess or my stitches would be too fast and she would just say, let me do it.

She was a fabulous mom in every way but that was the area that I felt like, I ended up not being very domestic and I had to learn to do things way too late.

[0:12:02.7] CW: She would want me to go study and I would or read a book or do something else. In fact, a good example of me is when I was married, just our early marriage, it was time to do the laundry

and I ended up putting everything in one – the washer and I turned all my husband’s T shirts and underwear that were white, pink. He was a wrestler in College at the time and I can imagine how embarrassing it was for him to come in with his pink underwear.

Anyway, lots to explain. I felt like I definitely had to learn to have skills in those areas. That forced me as a mother or reminded me as a mother to make sure that my children were learning skills early and participating in family tasks or chores early.

A good example is Lindsey when she – I was cleaning out the junk drawer. The TV was on, it was a Saturday and I thought, I’m going to get this junk drawer clean. She wanted to take it over and that kind of annoyed me, I have to admit it annoyed me. I wanted to get it done fast because I had other things to do. I said fine. I walked away and when I came back, that thing was done so beautifully, she was about five at the time, it was done so beautifully that well, what it did for me is realized that she could do these kind of things.

Actually became quite a good thing. That is a whole other thought. We’re developing character as we’re helping children gain skills, we’re also developing self-image. Again, it is so critical because there’s so many things just in small task that we’re asking children to do that we’re creating lifelong ability.

[0:13:41.9] CW: This is really critical. If a child isn’t taught to do things early and the parent does it for them, at what point do you start asking the child to start taking on chores and that’s when that stubbornness, that boredom, I don’t want to do it, then it’s the fighting and then it’s the cajoling and then it’s the bribing. It’s no longer a fun positive experience.

Like I said, do it early so they don’t get into that stage. Here’s some things that the children are able to do. They can’t and I’m saying at one and two years old, you know, certainly, at three. But this may surprise you or hopefully you’re doing this at home.

Also, my audience is early education teachers as well. So sometimes we don’t ask our children to do things early enough because we think they’ll make a mess. They can’t do this, they don’t have the coordination. Let them make a mess. It is okay. Because they’ll get better at it.

So pouring water or dry food into a dog or cat's dish or scooping out wet food with a spoon. Those are all important motor skills, fine motor skills, we're using the fingers, the hands and the arms which are really important. It is eye-hand coordination. If I am dropping dry food pellets or kibble into a bowl and they're bouncing out then I need to pick them out with my little fingers and I need to put them back in the dish. It is also teaching me to have an eye for detail.

I need to notice that the dog food has spilled out of the dish or if I had spilled water, I need to notice that I spilled water on the floor. One of my biggest complaints is that children just take the easy way out because they are not used to doing chores and if they make a mess they will take no responsibility for it and just walk away and it's not okay. They need to come back, complete the chore, do it the best, in fact, isn't it easier to do it right the first time around?

It's amazing to me because frankly, the worst thing I can think of is having to come back and do it again. So let's do it the right way the first time and then I don't have to come back and do it. It just gets easier and easier. I would always set a child up for success and by that I mean making sure they have an old rag there, a nice clean rag for them to hold no chemicals so that they can blot up the water that they've spilled that they can blot up with a sponge, paper towel.

Or that they have a little small child sized dust pan and a brush where they can pick up the food, they can use their hands or they can pick up with their hands and so I'm going to say it again, help them be successful by you prepping them ahead of time with the materials that they need to be successful. It is also important that you don't jump in and do it for them or take it out of their hands and say, "Let me do it" with an impatient voice.

[0:16:29.0] Messes are okay. You cannot expect them to be perfect. They are not going to be perfect and so it is really imperative that you allow them to go through the process no matter how they do it because we are going to help them improve. They can push the vacuum with you so that as you are vacuuming the floor they can have their hands on the vacuum stem whatever that is called or the bag and they could help you move it, which is actually helping them move their arms.

Using their hands and their fingers and moving their arms backwards and forwards and so they could get the feeling. They could feel it vibrate but best of all, they're doing it with you and they're learning and so

it's really a precious time and again, that was Maria Montessori's whole premise is having children participate in adult things because it is gaining those skills that they are going to need in adulthood. Let them make their attempts and then if you see that they're struggling because we don't want to reach too much frustration.

I have never say don't let them have any frustration or frustration is a part of life. If you rescue a child too early in their stage of frustration they will never cope with frustration well. We need to just let them feel it and then we're going to gently go over and say, "Let me give you some help with that" and it is gentle and it's patient and we're not taking it out of their hands and doing it ourselves. We are helping them learn. We want to give them that wonderful sense of "I can do it."

Because that is something that is going to last a lifetime and it isn't just chores. I think about school, homework. Homework is a task. It is a chore. It is hard. Very few people like to do homework. I don't care how old you are it's something that you have to do because it's expected and as a teacher. It is amazing to know how many children, teenagers do not do their homework. They leave it on their desk. They leave it in the car. They forget their backpack.

[0:18:23.3] These were all things because they were not taught early to be responsible and so can you imagine them getting their first job? They have to be able to have skills. They also have to have stick-to-it-ness and that stick-to-it-ness is imperative because otherwise you quit. You do a sloppy job because it is getting too boring. We have to teach children to work through boredom and because, well, you know what life is like as an adult. It isn't all a bowl of cherries.

We want to make sure that you provide the materials that they need. So you can go to the dollar store. They have tiny dustpans and small brushes there. They have lot of rags there so that they can have that, you might find them a small trashcan that they can carry around themselves. They make them very tiny ones. They have little brooms, you can go on Amazon, US Toy Company, etcetera and they have brooms. We certainly have all of those in our preschool.

So that the children can practice cleaning. They love playing in the kitchen. They love stirring, they love doing things for play and they love doing it for real. We cook with them and let them stir and pour in the ingredients and we talk and they're learning vocabulary. Making sure now when they're cooking they

can cut off soft vegetables and fruits and add to what you are cooking. You can have them in a safe spot where you can be close by and you can talk.

You can talk about recipes and this certainly helps them overcome pickiness because they are doing the process themselves. So they're going to be far more apt to eat what they are cooking and then you can make sure that they are enjoying the process at the same time and eating the fruits of their labor. They are so good at stirring. You can have them help you with packed lunches. That is an important thing to do with a new cute bento boxes that you can buy.

[0:20:11.8] You can have them place things in their little containers and get them into baggies and so therefore again, they are participating in their own lives, which is so important. Let them carry their dishes and utensils to the kitchen. Make sure that they are plastic just in case of dropping but don't get upset if they spill. You know that is okay, it is part of the process but then again, hand them a rag, hand them a paper towel. Let them do the cleanup.

I see this with our kids at our school, they are pretty messy. Boy if I have ever seen a child eat a cupcake or a cracker or a cookie or peas, oh my goodness, the floor underneath our chair is a disaster because they don't have that eye-hand coordination or that hand to mouth coordination and so they make a lot of spills of spilled water is just happening all the time. So instead of us constantly needing to clean up after them, we are going to do the final cleanup.

But they need to take care of that themselves. That is a very, very important and I will bet you that they will make less messes as they get older not even wanting to clean it up. They can brush the dog or the cat. They can pull up the covers with you when they are making the bed. They can help you drag the sheets up to the head of the bed. They can shake out small rugs. You can shake it together with them. They can dust low furniture, give them a dust rag and let them dust the low furniture.

It's actually very satisfying when you see how clean it looks. They can fold wash rags because they're tiny. These are things we teach our toddlers and preschoolers at Safari Learning that they can fold hand towels. They can fold their own socks and underwear. They can learn to put it in the proper drawer. You could even make pictures on the drawers so that they can find what drawer to put it in and of course you can help them if need be.

[0:21:56.1] They can put dirty clothes in a hamper. This thing about leaving clothes and shoes and stuff all over the floor, if you let that happen as a one and two and three-year-old child, it is going to continue all the way through their lives because then they are going to hate chores later and they're just not going to do it and then you are going to have to use every bit of persuasion and it becomes a power struggle and it becomes miserable and then it is contentious and adversarial.

And you don't want that and then you have to resort to bribery again. It is not a great way of living quite honestly and anyone who's raised children will agree. All the learning that takes place during these moments is remarkable and it's exciting because again, you are teaching them to be capable. To be competent. You are teaching them to feel terrific about themselves and you are also teaching them to be a part of the family, which I think is vital.

They are learning togetherness, family bonding, they are learning team work. They are learning to be cooperative. They are having us gaining a sense of usefulness. They're feeling good about themselves but they are useful members of the family and again, the whole prince princess thing does not work well. I am thinking about those kids that go all the way through their life where mom does the cooking regardless of her maybe working fulltime or dad and they do the laundry.

And they fold it and they put it away and they cook and they clean out the car and the child is not expected to do anything especially in the advent of technology where you know, they're on their laptops, iPhones continually. It is hard to even get them outside to enjoy the sunshine and then what happens when now they are in high school and they have to be more independent. What happens when they graduate from high school and they get either their first job.

[0:23:43.7] Well everyone is going to have to work, even in college you have to work. You have to. Very few people can get through college without having a job or two and then they don't have the skills able to do that and it's like, "Wait a minute, I have never put laundry in a washing machine. Where do I push?" so I was thinking about how does the boss feel when the person who's never ever done a chore in their life it's like that person is not going to become the servant of the person they've just hired.

Or neither is the college professor. So we want to also praise their efforts. It is important to praise them and as I've said before, we are not going to use the word good girl good boy because that's a moral issue. Skills are not moral. They're well done. So I really urge people to get away from the use of good boy-good girl or bad boy-bad girl because if for some reason they have not done something well or they are not behaving well then now we're saying it's opposite, you are a bad child.

That is really not the message that we want to give children. So you want to address the child and tell them how well they are doing. You got to be honest with them though. If they did not do a good job, you want in a gentle voice with patience say, "Hey, let's try that again" and do not take it away from them to do but work with them so that they can do it well, complete the task so they can feel terrific again. So here's how to word things.

You water the plants very carefully. "Do you see how the dirt is soaked? You did that so well." "I like how you fed the dog. You picked up the extra spilled dog food, well done." And so they get that great feeling of "I did it. Mom's pleased" or dad's pleased or grandparents are pleased or teacher is pleased. I am really big at children helping in the preschool, trust me that is something that teachers hear a lot as do children. Also, make a task chart.

[0:25:39.0] You want to make sure that you have it so that they can see the task. I would not overload them with tasks, give them a couple. Always start with one, add two as they get more and more capable. Add three, always make them sure that they are age appropriate because you don't want to breed a lot of frustration because that just shuts down the doors. Make a chart so that that in a Monday through, you know seven days a week or six days a week.

Five days a week, however you want to do it so that they can put a star on the task knowing that it is done and done well. So that's important. You could do gold for fantastic. You could do silver for pretty good or you want to use that good thing again but you know you did that pretty well but it could have been a little bit better. You can also do that too because children need to have a sense of understanding and you don't want to constantly tell them that they are perfect when they are not.

That is not okay because then they grow up to have a sense of first of all, that they deserve things. That they're deserving of winning things or gaining things when they really actually haven't worked for it and

that is not a good thing for kids. So make sure that what you're doing is you want to show them that their own consistency, that they are consistent and how they do things. So you can also do a trees or coins or gems in a jar and watch it build up.

I love to do popcorn because it's fun because then we could have a popcorn party and also, make sure that it is without grumbling. If they are grumbling and I don't think that they completely deserve their full reward on that one and again, we want to talk about allowances later. So in closing, we wanted to make sure that this is a wonderful family experience especially if there is older siblings in the house. Playing music while chores are going on.

[0:27:15.5] And something with a nice fast beat, not too fast that it gives them energy. Certainly don't want to put on a Brahms's lullaby when it's time for task doing. So make sure that it is fun and lively and laugh, enjoy, talk, praise, sing songs. How about whistle while you work? Teach them how to whistle and show them the seven dwarves and how they whistle while they work and teach them that song.

[END OF DISCUSSION]

[0:27:42.3]CW: So I hope this has been helpful and certainly loved to hear from you as always. I gave you our 800 number to call, 800-622-8104. You can also write me at char@zoo-phonics.com or char@safarilearning.com. We'd love to hear from you. We'd love to hear your ideas and see you next week.

[OUTRO]

[0:28:07.5] ANNOUNCER: That was Ed Talks with Dr. Char. You've been listening on KAAD-LP Radio live on 103.5 FM or streaming online at kaad-lp.org. If you would like to have Dr. Char answer any of your questions, please email your question to dr_char@zoo-phonics.com.

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