

<http://ParentingTeensOnline.com>

Parenting on the Run
Teens and Chores: It's a Family Affair
By Julie Mitchell

"Please make your bed." "Could you load the dishwasher after dinner?" "Would you help me clean up the garage?" How many times have we pleaded with our teenagers to do a chore and then found later that it never got done, or it was handled so poorly we have to finish the job? Surveys indicate that barely 20% of parents are happy with the amount of housework done by their teenagers.

Kate Kelly, author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Parenting a Teenager and Organize Yourself*, says a lot of teens tune out their parents' demands, or they simply refuse to learn the task. According to Kelly, and other experts, there are two kinds of chores: self-care, or taking care of one's own things—such as tidying up one's bedroom and bathroom—and family-care, such as taking out the garbage or cleaning up after dinner. But no matter what the chore is, many teens see them all as repugnant.

Solutions

#1 Explain the Job

Once you give your teen a new chore, assume he or she does not know how to complete it. Says Kelly, "When my daughter was a teenager, we left her alone for a couple of days, and it turned out she had no idea how to run the garbage disposal. What a mess!" If you demonstrate the right way to do a chore, such as making a bed—for example, showing where clean linens are kept, how to tuck in sheets and put a pillow into its case—it will probably get done more or less the way you'd like.

#2 Use the Team Approach

Being a family is a cooperative effort. "We do so much for our kids," says Kelly, "from driving them everywhere to helping with homework. Tackling a chore such as sweeping the deck and cleaning up the backyard helps teens understand that they can give back. "Teaching shared chores is a real kindness you can do for your child," Kelly says. Assign tasks for each family member, always remembering to say thanks and praise your teen for a job well done. Kelly adds, "Parents need to remind themselves to be grateful and appreciative of their children's efforts."

#3 Lower Your Expectations; Start with One Task

If you can't stand how your son consistently leaves his towel on the bedroom floor after his shower, tell him. But don't load on other chores at the same time. "Start with one thing," Kelly says. "Say, 'if you keep throwing your towel on the floor, you'll have to stay home Friday night,' and leave it at that." And make sure the chores you assign accommodate your children's schedules. A school night after a sports practice and a test looming the next day is not the best time to expect chores to be completed.

#4 Chores Can Be a Distraction

Test scores, relationship ups and downs, or preparing for college admissions can send the best-natured adolescent into a funk. But, just as adults can't shirk their duties because they're having a bad day, teens should be expected to follow through on their regular chores even when times are tough. "Actually," says Kelly, "a chore can give a teen an anchor when things aren't going well at school or socially. Taking the dog for a walk has nothing to do with an A or a B, and can serve as a welcome distraction."

Tips to Get Chores Done

Tasks that involve the family are more likely than self-care chores to promote a sense of responsibility and participation in family activities.

- Pay, if a chore is particularly difficult. If it goes above and beyond what's usually asked, most experts agree it is perfectly appropriate to pay your teen to do it.
- Let your teens have input into which tasks they feel they can complete on their timetable and according to their level of skills and abilities.
- Keep chores gender neutral. Many families are stuck in stereotypical role assignments (such as kitchen chores for daughters, and taking out the garbage and mowing the lawn for sons). Instead, teach your son to cook and do laundry; show your daughter how to wash the car and rake leaves.

Assign tasks for each family member, always remembering to say thanks and praise your teen for a job well done