

# Age-Appropriate Chores for Children and Youth with Visual Impairments



Karen Wolffe, AFA 2017 Conference

Children will need to do the listed chores first as helpers and slowly graduate to performing independently; however, younger children and children with multiple disabilities may require closer supervision and take longer to achieve independence. Children without vision may require hand-under-hand or hand-over-hand instruction and it's usually better for the parent or teacher to work from behind the child. If a child is unable to perform a chore due to physical limitations, find out if there is a "work-around" or tool that can make the task doable.

For example, mopping a floor without vision can be accomplished using a grid pattern and working in a consistent pattern. The person without vision may start on the north wall in the northwest corner and mop to the northeast corner, take one or two steps away from the north wall and mop from the east wall to the west wall, take another step or two away from the north wall and repeat the pattern until arriving at the south wall. To ensure full coverage, the pattern can be repeated on the east or west wall, starting on the northeast (or northwest) corner and mopping to the southeast (or southwest) corner. If there is furniture such as a dining table and chairs impeding access, the blind person would move the furnishing to a "quadrant" and mop first in the other areas, then move the furnishings to the mopped area and complete the task in the unmapped quadrant.

If a child uses a wheelchair and is unable to physically reach for and pick up clothes or toys that have been left on the floor or fallen, a reaching or grabbing tool with a telescoping arm may be appropriate to use when performing chores. Likewise, dusters with telescopic handles can be used to reach shelves, blinds, or ceiling fan blades that are too high for a wheelchair user to easily access. The key is to find tools and techniques that will enable children to perform tasks as independently as possible.

It is important to understand that cultural mores and family values or socioeconomic status also dictate the kinds of chores that children will perform in their homes. The following list is not definitive – it is meant as a guide. To determine what chores are most appropriate, it is important to either visit the child's home and observe or interview the parents or caregivers to determine the types of tasks that children in the home without disabilities are performing and help them understand how a child with vision loss or multiple disabilities may do so as well. Encourage parents to provide real cleaning and organizing tools – play tools should only be used for play.

When a child becomes proficient at a chore, it is time to give the chore to a younger child in the household. Many families will have the youngest child who is able to do a chore perform that job. When the child is learning a chore, he or she needs to be supervised by an older sibling or a parent. When possible, it is a good idea for children to work together to keep the house clean and organized. If there is only one child or a wide age spread between children, the parents may want to consider a "job jar" or "chore chart" to facilitate the coordination of responsibilities. For children who are visually impaired, the jobs in the job jar can be brailled and/or written out with a bold-line pen or marker so that they can read them independently. A chore chart can be set up with a bulletin board (cork or foam, for example) with "daily" boxes framed with yarn or string, painted on raised lines (you can use puff or 3-D paint), or something like Wikki Stix (waxed strings). The month and days of the week can be brailled or printed with a bold marker or in a large size font

such as Arial, Tahoma, or Verdana and laminated to preserve them. Chores can be brailled or printed on slips of paper much as described for a job jar. Children without the ability to read may benefit from calendar boxes or the use of tactually representative items on a chore chart such as a piece of a sponge to represent cleaning the sink, a small sock to represent the laundry basket and a dryer sheet to represent the laundry room, or a small spoon to represent the dishwasher.

Rather than visual-only evidence of successful chore completion (stickers on a calendar, for instance), use raised-line stickers (happy faces) and puffed stickers (stars) or punch-outs (you can literally use a hole-punch or purchase punches in shapes such as stars) on the family wall calendar or a special calendar with raised lines and braille or large print demarcations for the child with a vision loss. If families are comfortable with monetary rewards or an allowance that is contingent upon completion of chores, encourage them to set the rules for their children with visual impairments to match what they've done for their typically sighted children.

Parents and older siblings must remember that they are modelling for younger children what's important to them. If younger children see their parents and siblings consistently doing their chores, chances are they will learn to do the same. It may be helpful to have a family discussion before implementing any new chore responsibilities or system. Adults need to allow some decisions to be made by the children. The more children feel they are involved in making decisions, the more they will feel ownership of those responsibilities.

Parents may want to consider setting a specific time of the day when most of the chores are performed. Keeping in mind that children have other obligations besides chores is also important. It's critical to make sure there is plenty of time for homework and other mandatory activities. Parents will want to supervise closely to determine if children can handle the work they have from school and at home without struggling under the weight of all they have to do. If it's too much, consider removing some responsibilities or activities to relieve the burden.

However, if expectations are reasonable and children fail to complete their chores there need to be consequences. Sometimes the consequences happen naturally. For instance, if a child has a uniform for sport or a special activity, but fails to collect all the laundry, he or she may have to go out of uniform. Other times parents may have to take away rewards, an allowance, or other activities that are enjoyable. If an extenuating circumstance has kept a child from performing a job well, a parent may want to offer assistance to help the child or ask another to do so (this should be an occasional, not recurring, occurrence).

Parents typically have expectations of how a job should be performed. Teaching children how to perform chores and showing them what is expected when the chore is completed can go a long way to ensure success. Adults unfamiliar with techniques for completing home and personal management tasks with low vision may want to seek advice from an occupational therapist.

Finally, it's also important to schedule time for breaks. Allow children to break up or divide long chores. Parents may want to surprise their children by including fun activities in the job jar or planning a treat like a trip to the beach or public library on their chore charts. Slipping in such surprises among the routine chores can delight and encourage children to actively check the chart or visit the job jar. Families should not feel they must lock in to one system – changing up the routine, the presentation, or the rewards can help prevent boredom. (continued over)

## **Toddler (ages 2 and 3)**

- Pick up and put away toys (have a designated box or shelf available that is easily found – don't move it, use a bright colour that contrasts with the wall, or provide tactual cues for a child without vision).
- Unload the dishwasher or drying rack (place silverware – not knives in a section that the child can easily reach, use plastic plates and cups, include plastic storage containers in the drying rack as well) or let the child sort silverware into the drawer compartments as you hand items to him or her)
- Help dust with a feather duster, a microfiber rag, or with socks on their hands.
- Sweep the floor using a child-sized tool (you can either cut down a wooden or metal handle on a broom or sweeper – some brands actually come with handle segments that are screwed together or telescope to give the length needed).
- Put used (worn) clothes in the dirty clothes hamper or a laundry basket.
- Collect dirty clothes from other family members' rooms and common areas such as kitchen and bathrooms.
- Take laundry to the laundry room or washing machine. Or, help “bag” laundry for a trip to the Laundromat.
- Help get clothes from washer to dryer or from dryer to clothes basket for folding.
- Put his or her clothes away and deliver other family member's folded clothes to them or to common household areas.
- Make bed (this may only be pulling up a sheet or duvet, putting pyjamas under a pillow, or fluffing pillow initially)
- Wipe cabinets (this is another task that's easily accomplished with a sock on the dominant hand, if the child tolerates such well – teach the child to use the bare hand to “check” for stickiness or crumbs and use the hand with the dampened sock to wipe up).
- Wipe baseboards with soapy water or polish (use the sock technique).
- Put napkins on table (an older child or parent places silverware, plates, etc.).
- Help feed, water, and exercise pets.

## **Preschool (ages 4-5)**

- Perform all toddler chores with greater competence and confidence.
- Load the dishwasher or bring dirty dishes to the sink.
- Vacuum couch, chairs, or cushions with hand vacuum cleaner tool or a handheld vacuum (such as a Dustbuster).
- Rinse cans, collect in bins or bags for recycling.
- Collect newsprint, magazines or other paper products for recycling.
- Take out recycling for collection.
- Set the table (may initially just put out silverware and/or glasses – work toward inclusion of plates and condiments).
- Fill salt and pepper shakers.
- Clear table and put things away such as condiment containers.
- Wash dishes with supervision (you may want to start with plastic dishes and graduate to breakables – consider the use of surgical gloves to protect hands).
- Clean windows, storm doors, and mirrors.
- Wipe out bathroom sinks.

- Fold dish towels, washcloths, and small bathroom hand towels.
- Water plants and/or garden.
- Rake with child-sized rake.
- Help plant flowers, seed, or vegetables.
- Help strip bed.
- Help wipe up messes.
- Help put away groceries.

### **Early Elementary (ages 6-8)**

- Perform all toddler and preschool chores competently.
- Make bed.
- Help with meal preparation (wash produce, find ingredients, simple cutting)
- Wipe bathroom sinks, counters, toilets.
- Hang out laundry or load dryer.
- Sweep.
- Vacuum.
- Collect garbage and consolidate to be taken out for collection.
- Get mail.
- Fold and hang laundry.
- Put away laundry for self and other family members.
- Clean microwave (wipe out with soapy water and dry).
- Rake and bag leaves.

### **Elementary (9-11)**

- Perform all previous chores competently.
- Make simple meals (lunch for school, snacks, etc.).
- Help make desserts (cookies, cakes, brownies, etc.)
- Tidy bedroom and/or play or study room with direction.
- Take garbage and recycling to the curb or prepare for delivery to a collection site.
- Wash and dry clothes (by this age, children should have a system for marking their clothes to sort by colour and laundry type).
- Clean toilets using appropriate chemicals and tools.
- Mop, sweep, vacuum floors and/or carpets.
- Water plants.
- Help wash, vacuum, and wax the car.

### **Middle School (12-14)**

- Perform all previous chores competently.
- Clean bathtub and/or shower stall.
- Help plan meals and shop for ingredients.
- Put away groceries.
- Help make full meals (this may start with a simple breakfast or luncheon, then progress to dinner)
- Help clean out refrigerator and/or freezer.



- Mow yard and/or shovel snow.
- Wash, vacuum, and wax the car.
- Supervise younger children's chores

## **High School (15-18)**

By the time children reach late adolescence, they should have the ability to do almost everything around the house. While they don't necessarily do everything, they should be capable of performing competently and as independently as possible in all areas of home and personal management.

Remember that children mature at their own pace and not all children will be capable of advanced chores at the same age, just as some children may be ready for more difficult chores at a younger age. The most important guidelines are supervision and evaluation of children's needs and abilities. Children need to advance to more challenging chores as they master the basic ones. It can be easy to let children keep performing the same chores because they are good at them, but introducing new chores at regular intervals will actually benefit them in the long run. Be sure to encourage parents to implement training periods with new chores and to intersperse "easy" or learned tasks with "harder" or new tasks.

Many of the chores listed in this handout were captured from websites dedicated to listing age-appropriate chores for children without disabilities. My thanks to the following authors: Joanne McNulty and Sarah Aguirre.

Dr Karen Wolffe, 2017