

Domestic Skills

Is your child keeping a messy room?



Is your child:

- Saying “Make my bed?” “What dishwasher?” “Put my clothes in the hamper...No!”?
- Melting down in a moment when asked to do a simple household task?
- Making morning in your home feel like a warzone?
- Behaving in a way that leads you to feel guilty for having yelled at him all morning because he was so slow getting ready?
- Failing to take dishes to the sink and dropping dirty clothes on the floor?
- Struggling to do even one small chore?

LET’S TALK ABOUT IT

Some children do not seem to mature as quickly. They need more help, guidance, hand-holding and support to complete day-to-day tasks. You may find keep announcing, “If I had a dime for every time I told you to clean your room, I’d be a millionaire by now.” You might have no concerns academically, but you wonder if he or she would ever carry a plate to the sink, get a glass of juice, or put away a toy without your support. Perhaps

you are the parent of an 11-year-old, and you are already wondering, “How could my child ever have a roommate?” It may be that your child’s previously nice room has started looking like a science experiment gone wrong. You may be surprised that your otherwise capable child is unable or unwilling to do the simplest household chores.

CLINICAL DESCRIPTION

Daily living skills include self-care and domestic tasks. Self-care includes tasks like brushing your hair, brushing your teeth, getting dressed, bathing, and grooming. Domestic tasks may include taking a plate to the sink, vacuuming, unloading the dishwasher, putting away toys or making toast. Domestic tasks are important as we think about independent living skills for adulthood, such as college or entering in the work force. Someone who does not cook or clean may fail to show up to work tidy or may not be able to cook for himself, surviving on fast food alone.

If your child does not do chores, it is entirely possible that he or she is **typically developing**. A typical child may not participate in domestic tasks due to lack of motivation, unclear or inconsistent expectations, or simply bad habits that have been reinforced over time.

While doing chores around the house can be beneficial in teaching responsibility and maturity, chores may bring discouragement and frustration into your home. It is important not to let chores cause a constant battle. Learn to assign chores that are appropriate to a child’s age and ability. Keep expectations clear and consistent. Most typically developing kids will eventually learn to do chores if parents are persistent in providing direction and guidance while also holding them accountable.

Clinically, we must consider that **children with disabilities** often have challenges in one or more adaptive areas. For children who struggle with organization and focus, completing household chores may seem like an impossible task. These children need step-by-step instructions, hand-holding and immediate reinforcement to get chores done.

Children with *Autism* may have delays in many adaptive skills, including domestic skills. Children with *ADHD* may struggle with receptive communication and domestic and self-care skills. They may have difficulty keeping up with the sequence of tasks. When helping with the laundry they may become distracted in the middle of doing something, only to be found playing with a sock rather than emptying a full laundry basket. Children with emotional challenges may also be delayed in their adaptive skill development. *Anxiety or depression* can lead to poor task completion, a messy room, or an unclean bathroom.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CHILD DOESN’T CLEAN HIS ROOM

Getting some children to do chores may feel like fighting a losing battle.

Parents may give the chore, yell and scream about it, provide reminders and then end up doing it themselves. As clinicians, we find that some parents sigh with relief when we give permission to let a chore drop. It is better to not assign the chore at all versus assigning it, making it a constant issue and then eventually doing it yourself. Pick one or two chores, make them straightforward, tie completion of the chores to something fun and meaningful for your child and make sure your child either does the chore or has to skip out on the fun and meaningful reward. Make sure evenings and weekends are a mix of both fun family activities and important household tasks that have to get done.

Some children need more hand-holding than others. Make chore requests succinct and specific, and offer them one at a time. Make a visual chore chart, and provide some choice for your child in selecting chores to complete. Provide a weekly incentive, like family ice cream or a movie night, for each week that a certain number of chores are completed.

With young children, do the chore with them at first. “Let’s collect your Legos” is more manageable than “You have to clean your room.” Instead of multiple verbal reminders, direct your child to the chore board. If he or she is particularly stubborn, add a more immediate incentive like “15 minutes of Minecraft after you put away your clean clothes.” Try not to take things away, but rather provide incentives and reward for the behavior you want to see. This approach is easier to accomplish if parents have more control over the household. When children are provided unlimited access to electronics and other reinforcers, it is more challenging to find things to use as incentives. In this case, work to gradually take control; don’t try to do it all at once. Use something novel as a reinforcer, like a trip to the science museum or a special playdate.

SIMILAR SYMPTOMS

If your child is struggling with a similar problem, not directly addressed in this section, see the list below for links to information about other related symptom areas.

- [Communication skills \(Communicating\)](#): trouble with communication impacts a child’s ability to express his or her wants and needs, to understand rules and expectations and thus to complete tasks without much support. A Language Disorder could have an impact on chore completion.
- [Intelligence](#): trouble with thinking and reasoning can cause global delays that would encompass areas like communication, daily living skills, socialization and motor development
- [Motor challenges \(Moving & Sensing\)](#): trouble with movement can impact the ability to do chores. Motor impairments are a component of adaptive skills, particularly in younger children
- [Inattention \(Focusing\)](#): trouble with paying attention may lead to difficulties in receptive communication. Your child may get distracted and miss the directions.

Children who struggle to focus may have trouble with routines like clearing the table and putting away toys.

- [Behavior challenges \(Behaving\)](#): trouble with compliance and rule following may impact adaptive skills due to a pattern of poor behavior, self-care, and chore completion

POTENTIAL DISABILITIES

*Children who have significant problems in this area may have any of the following potential disabilities. *Note, this information does not serve as a diagnosis in any way. See the 'Where to Go for Help' section for professionals who can diagnose or provide a referral.*

- [Intellectual Disability](#): children with intellectual disabilities have multiple delays in cognitive and adaptive skills
- [ADHD](#): children with challenges in paying attention, impulsivity and hyperactivity often demonstrate “immature” behavior and lower skills in some areas like listening and following directions, emotional control, or self-care tasks
- [Autism Spectrum Disorder](#): children with deficits in social communication and restricted interests or behaviors can have a poor overall adaptive skills or social deficits, but they may have typical skills in other areas
- [Language Disorder](#): children who have challenges with communication struggle with functional communication and conversation skills; expressive and receptive language may be less developed in children who have language delays
- [Anxiety or Depression](#): children who have excessive worry or sadness are likely to struggle with day-to-day functioning. Children with these emotional difficulties may withdraw from peers, communicate less and let self-care and domestic skills decline
- **Typical development**: it is entirely possible that your child does not have a developmental problem or disability. It could be that your child is simply refusing to do these tasks due to the lack of maturity, preference, or motivation expected of most young children. Try some of the strategies listed above. If these strategies are not successful and your child is in the teen years, it may be time to seek support from a professional.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

If your child is struggling with this symptom to the point that it is getting in the way of his learning, relationships, or happiness, the following professionals could help; they may offer diagnosis, treatment, or both.

- [CLEAR Child Psychology](#): to obtain a *customized profile* of concerns for your child or to *consult 'live'* with a psychologist
- [ABA Therapist](#): to help to improve behavior, increase adaptive skills. In-home treatment plans make addressing self-care and domestic skills easier. This

therapy is often covered by insurance for Autism Spectrum Disorders but can be helpful for other diagnoses as well. With typically developing children who have isolated challenges in an area like completing chores, even a session or two of parent training may help to develop strategies and systems of reinforcement to increase task completion

- [Psychologist or Neuropsychologist](#): to conduct a full assessment to examine symptoms in a mental health and/or behavioral context
- [Psychotherapist or Play Therapist](#): to treat emotional symptoms as needed
- [OT or Speech Pathologist](#): to treat any associated motor or language deficits. It is possible to have extremely poor self-care and domestic skills in isolation (without any other challenges); however, if other concerns are present, these issues can be addressed in therapy

These professionals may recommend the following tests for this symptom:

- [WISC-V](#): IQ test used to establish a baseline of intellectual abilities, which can help us understand your child's cognitive strengths and weaknesses (Psychological or School Psychological evaluation)
- [Vineland-3](#): adaptive test of overall development for ages birth to 21 years that includes communication, socialization and daily living skills. (Psychological or Neuropsychological evaluation)
- [TOL-2, CTMT, WCST, TOVA](#): tests of executive function may help to determine the skills your child has, such as the ability to plan, organize, and pay attention (Neuropsychological evaluation)
- [ADOS-2](#): test of social communication skills in consideration of autism (some items relate to concerns in adaptive and communication domains) (Psychological or Neuropsychological evaluation)
- [Roberts, BASC-3, Clinical Interview, RCMAS, CDI-2, Human Figure Drawing](#): emotional tests through drawing tasks, open-ended questions, interviews, rating scales, and sometimes storytelling could provide useful information into the emotional experience (Neuropsychological or Psychological evaluation)

LEARN MORE

[1] Cook, Julia (2016). *Planning isn't my priority... And making priorities isn't in my plans.*

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Planning-Isnt-Priority-Functioning-Executive/dp/1937870391/>

[2] Cooper-Kahn, Joyce & Dietzel, Laurie C. (2008). *Late, lost, and unprepared: A parent's guide to helping children with executive functioning.*

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Late-Lost-Unprepared-Executive-Functioning/dp/1890627844/>

[2] Siegel, Dan (2013): *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*.

Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/dp/0399168834/ref=rdr_ext_tmb

[3] Siegel, Daniel J. & Bryson, Tina Payne (2012). *The whole brain child: 12 revolutionary strategies to nurture your child's developing mind*.

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Whole-Brain-Child-Revolutionary-Strategies-Developing/dp/0553386697/>

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Child-chores-chart

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