

INSIGHTS

by Michael Grose – No. 1 parenting educator



How emptying the dishwasher can build independence

You can learn a lot about a family by knowing who clears their dishwasher. Who empties yours?

The choice of who empties the dishwasher in your family tells a great deal about your parenting philosophy.

If you or your partner usually do it then *I humbly suggest that you maybe working too hard*. You're letting your kids off the hook.

On the other hand, if one or all of your kids (over the age of three) have this job then **congratulations**. You're travelling down the road toward **redundancy**, and your children are heading toward **independence**.

Many parents would love their kids to do this task but pragmatism (*"It's easier to do it myself"*), lack of faith (*"They're sure to break something!"*) and unwillingness to let go (*"It's my job after all"*) get in the way.

Why the dishwasher?

Good question. Here are seven good reasons:

1. These days almost every house has one, and it's a job that just has to be done!
2. It's fiddly and tedious, and it needs to be **done right**, which is a great lesson for kids to learn.
3. Kids learn that **everything has a place** in the kitchen, which is a great lesson for those who are organisationally challenged. Knowing their way around the kitchen is also an important first step toward children making their own snacks and preparing meals – a worthy aim!
4. It's emptied every morning/day, second morning/day so kids learn about **routine**.
5. As it needs to be emptied whether they feel like it or not, kids learn about **grit** (*the ability to stick at a task even though it's boring*) and **self-control** (*through delaying gratification*) – two important character strengths that contribute to kids' success.
6. **If they don't do it then who will?** It teaches kids that others rely on them, as well as the other way around. *Believe me, I see many young people who've never learned this lesson at home!*
7. **Kids are hard-wired to help** but they need the opportunity to do their bit at home. The dishwasher is the perfect opportunity that never goes away!

There are plenty of other reasons for putting the dishwasher on the kids' chores list, but that should be enough to get you thinking.

Okay, but does it have to be the dishwasher?

Smart parents put principles into practice to suit their circumstances.

So, if you buy into the notion that kids should routinely help at home without being paid, and that your aim is to make yourself redundant – but getting them to empty the dishwasher just doesn't cut it in your world – find a similarly regular, laborious task that they can do that will also benefit others.

No dishwasher? You have an advantage

Of course, families without a dishwasher have a great communication mechanism at their disposal. That is, one person washing (a parent) and the other drying (a child/teenager) provides a fabulous shoulder-to-shoulder parenting opportunity. As many parents have discovered, when a child or young person's hands are busy their tongue suddenly loosens up and the chat happens naturally.

Gradually, then suddenly

If getting kids to help is an uphill battle then I suggest you don't let up. **Keep expecting them to help**. Keep working on a chores roster and keep at your kids to do the right thing. One day it will all click and helping out will become habitual, hardwired into their brains so that helping out becomes neurological as well as psychological.

That's why **'gradually, then suddenly'** is a really useful parenting mantra. The Australian cricket team's recent success can be attributed to this approach. They'd been **gradually** improving by doing all the right things throughout 2013 without success and then **suddenly** it all clicked in the Australian summer. But that's another story...



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