



READ WITH A GRAIN OF SALT

Because every child is different. But experts suggest these general targets by age.

AGES 5 TO 7

- Put away pots and pans
- Fix toast and cereal
- Pack lunch
- Load backpack, going through a written or mental checklist of what will be needed for school that day
- Get fully dressed, including shoes
- Make bed independently
- Sort dirty laundry into lights and darks

AGES 8 TO 10

- Load dishwasher
- Write a grocery list
- Keep school materials organized
- Track homework coming in and going out. (Parents will need to help set up the system for this initially.)
- Shop for school clothes within a budget, with adult guidance

AGES 11 AND UP

- Help with household chores, including laundry, dishes, and yard work
- Take initiative to organize long-term school projects
- Work a part-time job
- Manage own bank account

ABOUT AGE 2

- Carry plastic dishes from the table to the sink
- Pour flour into a bowl
- Put away a few toys when asked
- Fold small blankets and towels (with a demonstration)
- Put on pull-up pants and slip-on shoes without help

AGES 3 TO 4

- Dress self, except for tying shoes
- Portion food from a larger to a smaller container
- Pour liquid from a child-size pitcher into a wide-mouthed cup
- Place napkins on the table
- Put clean laundry on a shelf or in a drawer



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break it down first at home. "If you role-play what to say and do in a tough situation, it builds up their ability to handle the problem alone," says Erickson.

5. HAND OVER THE REINS. Once your child reliably masters a task, relinquish responsibility. If she needs a refresher course later on, have one. Kids need to fly solo as they mature. "My daughter had severe asthma, and it was extremely important for her to learn to recognize the early signs of an attack and manage her medication," says Erickson.

6. SUPPORT SUBTLY. When things don't go well, be there, but without Oscar-caliber dramatics. "So she stumbles on the playground. She'll learn that she has limitations, which affects decisions about next time," says Jackson. "She'll realize, 'I got hurt, but I lived. My parents were cool about it. I'm proud I tried.'"

7. LET THEM FAIL. This especially applies to schoolwork, one of the great battlegrounds. "Let your kids know the times you'll be available for help but that you're not going to drop everything right before a project is due," says Nelsen. Here's

the rub: This lesson isn't learned unless you're willing to stick to your pledge and let them fail—something that gets harder to do as the stakes rise. "Going to school unprepared is rough, but it's experiencing natural consequences," says Harris. Your job in the aftermath is to offer a safe place to process emotions and think about how to do things differently next time.

Rewiring older kids

Sometimes things slip. You wake up one morning to your high schooler's pleas for breakfast. Or a pile of your college kid's laundry. Is it too late to teach self-sufficiency? "The longer you wait, the harder it is. But it's never too late," says Erickson. Step one: Own it. "Admit that you messed up and tell them you're sorry. Let them know that the expectations are changing as of this minute, and then teach them how to do things as necessary," says Erickson. "Hold the line." And be prepared to see pink undershirts around the house.