

Is Doing Household Chores Related to Executive Functioning?

THIS RESEARCH UPDATE examines two recent studies examining the link between executive functioning and involvement in household chores. Executive functioning refers to cognitive processes such as the ability to shift focus between tasks, manipulate and access temporary information, and inhibit or suppress irrelevant information. Children with neurodevelopmental disorders, such as ADHD, experience delays in executive functioning, and therefore have difficulties with self-regulation and problem-solving.

The first study found that children who are more engaged in household chores have better executive functions, compared to children who are less engaged in household chores. The second study found that children with ADHD experience difficulties in completing household chores. Together, these findings show that involvement in household chores is related to executive functioning, such that a child with ADHD and challenges in executive functions is less likely to be engaged in household chores.

The possibility that chores could improve executive functioning holds great potential for parents who wish to support their children in developing their cognitive abilities at home. Overall, these studies indicate that an association exists between household chores and executive functioning, and future studies are needed to determine whether being involved in household chores will causally lead to improved executive functions.

Does doing chores predict cognition?

This study explored whether children who engage in household chores have higher executive functioning. The authors noted that although studies of children have found that engaging in chores improves quality of life and increases feelings of autonomy, few studies have explored the relationship between cognitive development and household chores. This study therefore examined this question among parents and legal guardians of children aged five to thirteen.

Two hundred and seven participants between the ages of twenty and fifty-eight years in countries across North America, Europe, Asia, and Oceania were involved in this study, with approximately 74% of participants from Australia. About 11% of participants had children with a disability, such as ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, and dyslexia. They completed parent-report questionnaires about child executive functioning and child involvement in chores between July 2020 and August 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approximately 51% of the participants reported that their children's engagement in chores did not change compared to the start of the pandemic, whereas 38% of participants reported that their child's involvement in chores increased compared to usual. Ultimately, study results



found that children who engaged in both self-care (putting away one's own clothes, for example) and family-care (setting the table, for example) chores had higher executive functioning in the areas of working memory and inhibition. However, results were mixed as there was no evidence to suggest that being involved in pet-care chores (such as providing food for a pet) was related to executive functioning.

This study only examines chore involvement and executive functions at one point in time, and therefore can only determine that child involvement in particular chores is associated with certain executive functions. Therefore, future studies are needed to investigate whether chore involvement actually causes improvements in executive functions.

Tepper DL, Howell TJ, & Bennett PC. (2022). Executive functions and household chores: Does engagement in chores predict children's cognition? *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1440-1630.12822>

Does ADHD affect engagement in household chores?

This study examined the relationship between ADHD and household chores. Understanding this relationship is important given that chores are part of household routines, and prior research has found that routines are associated with a child's sense of security and predictability as well as self-regulation and inhibition. Past research has also found that household chores early on predicts later positive effects, such as self-efficacy and professional success, better relationships with friends and family, concern for other family members, less substance use, and lower psychological symptoms.

Seven hundred and ninety-seven parents of youth with ADHD aged six to eighteen completed an online questionnaire examining demographic and clinical information as well as self-care and family-care chores. The authors found that the majority of parents reported that their children with ADHD did not complete chores satisfactorily or independently on a regular basis, including both self-care and family-care chores.

Children with ADHD were reported as being less involved with household chores than children without ADHD. Parent participants also noted that their children with ADHD needed greater support and reminders in completing chores than children without ADHD, and that ADHD impacted their children's ability in completing chores.

Given the developmental advantages of involvement in household chores, youth with ADHD may be in a position where they are less likely to receive such benefits. As well, prior research shows that parents who are more involved in assisting their children with household chores experience more parenting stress. Therefore, parents of children with ADHD are also at risk of experiencing greater stress regarding the completion of chores.

Overall, this research indicates that ADHD in youth is associated with lower engagement in household chores, which is associated with missed opportunities for developmental benefits as well as more stress for parents. Future studies are needed to better understand how to support children with ADHD in improving their involvement in household chores.

Spaulding SL, Fruitman K, Rapoport E, Soled D, & Adesman A. (2021). Impact of ADHD on household chores. *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 25, 1374-1383. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1087054720903359>



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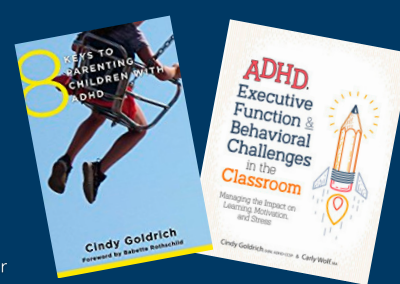
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