

# How To Encourage Equality in the Home

Parenting coach Lena Engel's top tips on how to encourage equality of opportunities, expectations and skills for your children



There feels like a lot of pressure for most parents to bring up happy, academically successful and well-adjusted children. In addition, there is a strong desire among many parents for their children to learn about equality of opportunities, expectations and skills. In view of this, what are the sorts of habits and routines families can develop to promote equality?

The nature of family life has changed over the last 30 years with more and more households featuring both parents working. Additionally, many households are separated with parents living apart and both working but sharing the upbringing of children in a number of ways. Whatever standpoint parents adopt on sharing responsibilities, they can consider ways to inspire their children to learn life skills and philosophies that enable boys and girls to become independent and resilient.

## 1. Role modelling

Parents are the primary carers and children emulate their parents, copying how they move, as well as what they do and say. Parents need to be aware of giving children visual and verbal cues, such as taking turns with all aspects of routine work in and out of the home. Children should see parents breaking the old school stereotypes, with dads doing domestic jobs like hoovering, cooking, making the beds and doing the washing, cleaning the toilet and bath, as well as being there to read and play with them, bathe them and put them to bed. They should see their mums looking after a car or bike, digging and planting the garden, changing light bulbs and solving computer problems.

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## 2. Delegating tasks

As soon as children can walk and talk happily, from two years old even, they can begin to learn to take on simple tasks and develop independence skills, such as mixing ingredients in a bowl, fetching things that you need, helping to set the table, working in the garden, washing their toys, serving themselves at mealtimes, brushing their teeth and dressing themselves. Give them simple instructions, breaking them down so that they begin to learn the sequence of the actions they need to remember to perform. Do this by developing an engaged way of explaining them. 'What is the first thing we have to do when we brush our teeth? Yes, find your toothbrush, where is that? Good, go and fetch it.' Use this method to get to the next sequence, and the next until they can manage the whole skill.

## 3. Ensuring that children feel you deal with them fairly

This can be done by asking the children to choose the rules for the home with you. Write them in short positive sentences, explaining to them that they can remind each other - as well as their parents - to comply with them. Rules make sense when everyone takes them seriously.

## 4. Not using the blame game

Ensure you agree a rule which states how positive sharing and solving problems can be. Then use this four step approach to manage difficult situations:

- a. Comment on how well they are playing together
- b. If there is an altercation, approach the children to remind them they were playing nicely and that they have to solve their problems by communicating and sharing amicably
- c. If there is still a problem when you have left them to play again, remind them that you will separate them if they do not comply and sort their problem - give them time to do this
- d. Finally if there is no sign of resolution and the argument escalates, take whatever they are arguing over away. Explain that they will get it back after 10 minutes, once they are ready and calm. Or if they were arguing and becoming physical and will not stop, separate them, allowing them to each do something different. Equality is not about searching for someone to blame, or listening to accusations. Remind the children that they can apologise to each other when they feel they can and want to. Expressing regret only becomes real when you mean it.

## 5. Descriptive praise empowers personal self-esteem

Children learn to manage themselves within the boundaries that you create for them because they want to please their parents. If you always give them descriptive praise, which is telling them in detail what you like about what they do well, they feel appreciated for the efforts that they make.

## The Bottom Line

Equality is about feeling **valued for who you are and what you achieve as you grow**. It is about enabling boys and girls to feel equally challenged by the opportunities you offer them and the skills they learn from

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you, their family and close friends. Equality in a family is being listened to and feeling that your contribution is just as significant whether you are younger or older, a girl or a boy.

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