

FIRST 5 S H A S T A

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Learning, Growing and Getting the Job Done

Today's family is busier than ever and time together is precious. With one or both parents working and children active in playgroups, preschool and special activities, it takes family spirit and active participation by one and all to manage the day-to-day family operations. Assigning age-appropriate chores to young family members doesn't just help get the job done. It builds a sense of belonging, of competency and instills self-worth that results in positive behavior in childhood and later in life.

Children thrive in a reliable environment where they can count on routines. Establishing routine chores where every family member makes a valuable contribution strengthens the family foundation and individual decision-making abilities. Says Nancy Bennett of the Family Service Agency's home visiting program, "As early as the toddler years, children can begin collecting their own toys at the end of the day and help put them away. Pitching in around the house helps them feel good about themselves and teaches them responsibility."

The Family Service Agency's home visiting program, funded in part by a grant from First 5 Shasta*, provides families with the help they need to decrease potential chaos and build a healthy family structure. To help create a solid base, home visitors help parents create a chore chart that shows expectations, offers rewards, and insures everyone is working together.

When children are listened to and taken seriously, they feel respected and behave more respectfully toward others. Holding family meetings is a great way to give children a voice in the family and include them in decisions such as the fair distribution of chores. First 5 Tehama has funded a Family Resource Center, located in Red Bluff, that offers parent education classes. According to Denise Snider, First 5 Tehama's Executive Director, these classes focus on positive discipline and promote family meetings as essential to building strong families.

Family meetings involving children below five years of age might be scheduled once a week and last from 15 to 30 minutes. Plan for the meeting by posting an agenda on the refrigerator where everyone can list an issue or item they want to address. Small children can draw a picture if they want to include something. Family meetings should focus on solutions, rather than blame, and covering items of interest to the children first helps steer the meeting in a positive direction.

Denise believes that "family meetings help develop a sense of belonging and community within the family. A family meeting is a special time where ALL family members participate, bringing fun and issues to the meeting for discussion and resolution. Each family member is important and their participation in the meeting and the family as a whole is valued."

"Look mom, I did it!" exclaims a triumphant preschooler who has successfully stuffed a combination of toys, games and dirty socks into the toy chest. The lid may not close, but it is the effort that warrants a "Good job!" from mom or dad. It is important to offer children positive feedback as they begin to make decisions and find ways to help others.

Offering children new challenges as they grow continues to boost their sense of accomplishment. For example, a preschooler is able to bring napkins to the dinner table. A ten year old can help in the yard. A teenager can be fully responsible for what lurks behind that bedroom door. Involving children in family life lets them know they have a distinct role in the family and children are empowered when they know they are valued.

Families learn and grow together. The family situation offers endless opportunities to teach children the skills they will need for success as adults. By creating a family model that empowers and encourages children, parents and children work together to get the job done – from simple tasks to the greater challenge of raising healthy, successful children.

First 5 Shasta, the Shasta Children and Families First Commission , was established after California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cent-per-pack tax on cigarettes to fund education, health, child care and other programs to promote early childhood development for expectant parents and children up to age five. The Shasta Commission receives approximately \$1.8 million annually in Prop 10 revenues.