



INVITATION TO INDEPENDENCE

It happened so quickly, that little baby that just last year relied on you for so much of their day-to-day care can now, brush their own teeth, get dressed on their own and is most likely potty trained. For a 4-year-old each day is filled with the search for independence. I will never forget the time my own four-year-old was allowed to finish drying after his bath and get dressed on his own for the first time. I was sitting on my couch and here came this very proud little guy all dressed in his jammies, you could tell he was "walking tall", he came to me lifted his arm and said "Mommy, smell my breath, I used daddy's odorant". That's right, he lifted his armpit so I could "smell his breath". At four all he cared about was that he did something just like the adults do and he did it all on his own.

Why?

An important developmental milestone at four is emotional and physical independence. Giving your child some responsibility at home can show them that not only you believe in what they can do, but it will give them a sense of accomplishment and pride in themselves. We have tried to teach them how to be a good friend, but they also need to know who is being a good friend to them. Fours are starting to become more aware of other people's feelings and feel a broad range of emotions themselves. Help your child by giving them personal independence. This can be just as big a step for you as it is for them. We want them to have a great foundation to build on and help them to be prepared for the challenges that they will face on their own. Let them know that you believe in them. Show them that they are capable and they will be.

How?

An independent child. Does that thought make you excited or scare you to death? Maybe a little of both. It is up to us as parents to prepare our children and to teach them how to be the best they can be. We have **two activities for you to help give your child independence**. Keep in mind that not all children are alike, and some will shine in some areas and have trouble in others. Help them to set goals for themselves that are attainable but still create an opportunity for growth.

You have spent the first years of their lives watching them grow and helping them learn who they are. Now that they are getting ready to start a new stage, we want them to feel encouraged and equipped. Raising an independent child may be hard to do, but you are giving them a gift independence is something they will carry with them for a lifetime.



Activities:

Activity 1: Independence at Home

Jim Fay who cofounded Love and Logic says we all need to feel needed and know we're making a contribution. One way for children to have this same need met is through chores. Chores at home give a child a sense of worth and belonging. Each person in a family has a different role to play.

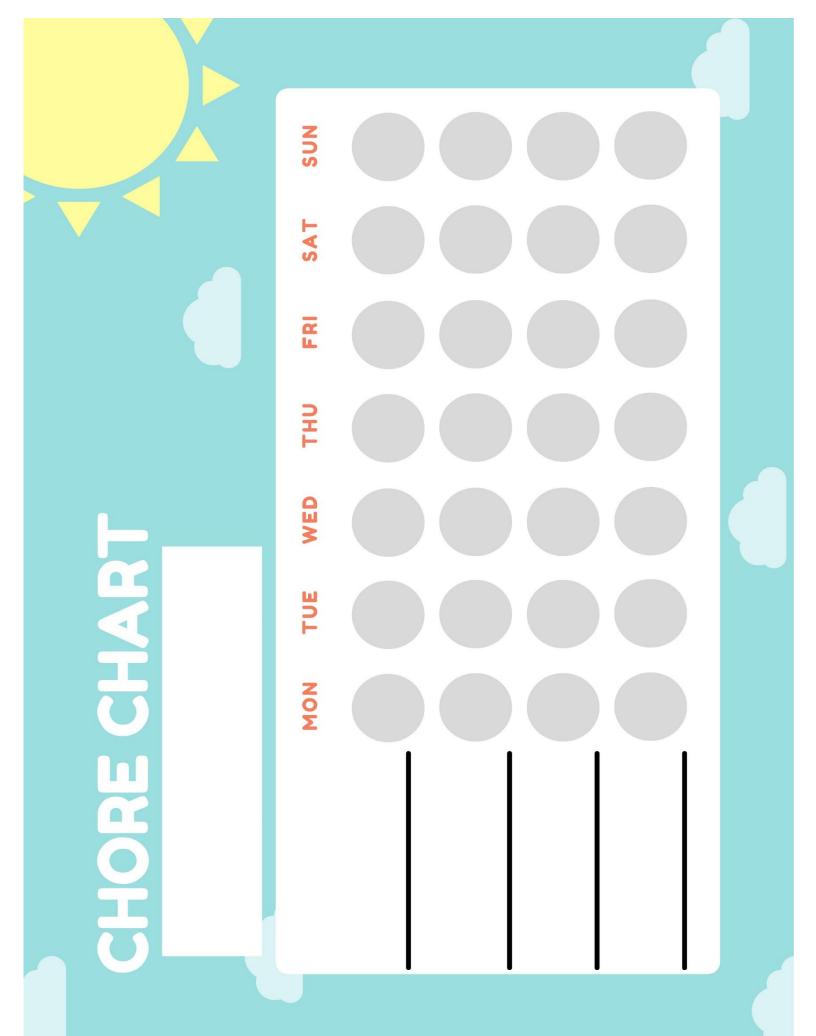
When it comes to children doing chores, even us as adults doing chores around the house, it's a picture of us putting others needs above our own. We wash our children's clothes so they'll have clean ones. We cook food so bodies are fueled to move and grow. Chores are a way to serve our family. When you look at Jesus you see the perfect picture of someone who came to serve. **Read Philippians 2:3-11 now.**

Our children at the age of 4 and 5 are perfectly capable of helping around the house. Maybe you've already given your child some chores around the house, maybe not. Here are a few things to remember when it comes to setting your child up for successful independence at home with chores:

- 1. Choose developmentally appropriate chores. Don't ask your preschooler to put up the glass dishes in the top cabinet. Children can make beds, set tables, put up clean clothes, etc.
- 2. Realize they won't do it exactly like you do. It's OK if the bed has a few wrinkles in it!
- 3. Be consistent. If you want your child to make his/her bed, make sure that's expected every day. If you do it some days, and expect it others, it sends inconsistent messages to your child about what he/she needs to do.
- 4. Show your child exactly what you want them to do. If you want them to clean their room do it with them a couple times talking them through each step. Your son/daughter may not think to clean off the top of the dresser. If that's important to you, make sure you show your child exactly what you mean by "clean your room."
- 5. Let your child help decide which chores they'll be responsible for.

When children feel independent at home it will carry over into other areas of their lives. This is the best and safest place to start. Empower your child to make a difference at home, to contribute to the family and feel needed in the process.







Activity 2: Independent Acts of Friendship

At four years old friendships are starting to be a big deal. By four years, most children will be able to tell the difference between 'my friend' and other children they know, they start to establish real friendships and may even have a "best friend". At this age, your child will more readily share and will do their best to solve problems with solutions that appease everyone. This is a great time to teach children how to be a good friend and love everyone like Jesus.

A few days before your child's birthday have them choose a few "acts of friendship" to show love like Jesus. I suggest that your child chooses 1 act of service per year of age, so at four they will choose four acts. This could work by using the suggestions included here or just let them decide what an act of friendship looks like to them. This is a tradition that can carry on throughout your child's life.



RANDOM ACTS		
PAINT A KINDNESS ROCK AND HIDE IT IN THE PARK	SMILE AT EVERYONE YOU SEE	HUG A FRIEND
TELL A JOKE	HELP A FRIEND CLEAN UP	DRAW A PICTURE FOR A FRIEND
LET SOMEONE GO BEFORE YOU IN LINE	ASK A NEW FRIEND TO PLAY	OPEN THE DOOR FOR SOMEONE
DONATE SOME OF YOUR TOYS	DO AN EXTRA CHORE AT HOME	TELL SOMEONE GOOD JOB
GIVE A FLOWER	HELP A SIBLING	SHARE
SAY THANK YOU	CALL SOMEONE TO SAY HELLO	GIVE A FRIEND A TREAT



WHAT'S GOING ON WITH MY 4-YEAR-OLD?

Here is a guide to help give you a glimpse of what might be going on inside your four-year-old.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Gross Motor Movement and Coordination: Move with enough control to perform more complex tasks. Maintain balance on a two-byfour beam; climb with more agility on the jungle gym; jump with confidence in ability from low platform; develop coordination of moving arms and legs in order to pump on a swing; run up to ball and kick it while maintaining balance; gallop, wiggle, and tiptoe along with classmates watching and imitating movements; throw a variety of objects overhand with increasing accuracy.

Fine Motor:

Use hands with increasing control and precision for a variety of purposes. Easily grasps hold of writing tools such as pencils, crayons, paint brushes and markers; continue to fit together a wide variety of items such as connecting blocks, pop beads, stacking rings, bristle blocks, etc.; shape play dough or clay into more intricate/ representational creations; experiment with scissors; experiment with fitting a variety of objects into a defined space; continue to experiment with building and designing familiar structures with blocks.

Self Help:

Begin to perform self-help skills and follows basic health and safety rules. Use toilet independently; put on own hat and coat; wash and dry own hands with verbal prompts and support; untie shoes, button and unbutton with little or no assistance; know basic safety rules and follow them with verbal reminder; begin to look both ways before crossing the street; begin to understand how to dial 911 for an emergency; begin to avoid dangers such as hot stoves and sharp knives.

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT Self-Concept:

Show positive self-esteem. Recognize own special interests and abilities (child announces, "I can run really fast!"); expresses pride in accomplishments.

Verbalize feelings, needs and wants. Talk to self and others (including dolls, puppets, imaginary friends) about what he/she is thinking about and how he/she feels; continue to use physical ways of expressing self when feelings are intense.

Show greater comfort with independence and increased feelings of self- worth. Take pride in accomplishments ("I did the puzzle by myself!"); develop a sense of humor; can laugh at self and others when small accidents happen.

Self-Control:

Manage own behavior with increasing skill. Gain new understanding about other people's feelings to guide the way he manages his own behavior (may decide to share a toy after another child begins to cry).

Begin to demonstrate an understanding of social expectations. Cover mouth when sneezing, hold door for another child, share blocks with another child.

Cooperation:

Engage in cooperative play with other children. Can include give and take in play with others; sometimes work out problems encountered during play with others. Begin to develop more complex pretend play themes. May imitate cultural or family routines or rituals (going to church, visiting aunt in the hospital, riding the bus). Show increasing willingness to work out problems with peers. More willing to talk about problems and issues to work out solutions; participate in transitions and assist with routines (e.g., help other child clean up spilled water). Show increasing willingness to work out problems with peers. More willing to talk about problems and issues to work out solutions; participate in transitions and assist with routines (e.g., help other child clean up spilled water)





RELATIONAL/SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

These are the philosophers of the human race. They ask the big questions that have puzzled people from the beginning of time. And they ask one question after another, often following our best answers with an innocent, but frustrating "Why?" To make things even more challenging, they expect simple, clear answers to their short, but deeply profound questions. They think about God in very literal, physical terms, and it frustrates them to receive abstract, "spiritual" answers. Give the shortest, correct answer possible. Then ask if the answer was helpful or if they want to know more. Avoid the temptation to explain all the facets of the issue the child has raised. When it's simply not possible to give a simple answer, point out that God is so great there is much about him that no one really understands. Then state one or two essential truths about God that we do know for sure.

