

Home team win!

Many hands make light work, but when it comes to household jobs, helping hands often disappear. Here's how to get everyone involved

Imagine living in a home where the fridge is always full and your sock drawer is never empty. Bills are paid on time, birthdays never forgotten. There's even enough spare time to run yourself a bath. Sound like a distant dream? Hardly surprising when research shows that half of those who say their home isn't as clean as they'd like blame it on being too busy'.

With the burden of housework often falling to one person, it's no wonder so many of us are drowning in our to-do list, which includes remembering everything from sports days to adding washing powder to the shopping list.

'This mental load can actually cause more exhaustion than the physical load of running a home,' says Martina Sheehan, author of *Do Less, Be More* (Hay House). We think it's time for less stress and more fun, so let go of the reins and get everyone to help out. Hello teamwork!

HOLD A MEETING

'This is the best way to get everyone on board diplomatically,' says Fiona Bennett, professional organiser at simplifyyourhome.co.uk. First, make a list of all the jobs that need to be done to keep things ticking over. This might include putting the bins out, feeding the pets or doing the washing up. See if you can share out these jobs, agreeing when they will be done and by whom.

'Handle the process carefully and respectfully,' says Fiona. 'It should be a sharing of ideas, where everyone is heard.' Discuss the chores you dislike. What one person hates, another may find bearable. If there are jobs you all dislike,

you could do them as a team, or take it in turns. You will need to be flexible in allowing people to do a task in their own way without criticism. If you're really fussy about folding sheets super-neatly, it might be best to do this job yourself.

CREATE INCENTIVES

Children will need a bit of motivation, says Fiona. 'A tidy house is not something they aspire to, so you need to come up with something more exciting. I've researched the pros and cons of monetary rewards for children and if you reward them for every job, you run the risk of them refusing to do tasks because they have enough money saved up.'

The best way to avoid this is to have a basic set of jobs that are compulsory (keeping their room tidy and taking dirty clothes to the laundry basket for example), while things like helping clean the kitchen and bathroom are extras they can earn from.

'For younger children, instead of money try another reward system,' says Fiona. 'We use marbles in a jar - my twins earn marbles for doing jobs or showing kindness. Have a target of 10, and when that's reached, your child can have a pre-arranged reward such as a set amount of screen time.' Happy days!

BUILD A MEAL PLAN

Meal planning and shopping can eat up hours. 'I suggest having a two-week rolling meal programme that you tweak when you need to,' says Fiona. This way you have a shopping list ready to go each week. If you already share the cooking, that's great. If not, get everyone to choose a meal from the list they'd be happy to make or help to make.

NIP ANNOYING HABITS IN THE BUD

Find out what irritates your household. This is a chance not only to air grievances (calmly, now) but to have a giggle too. After you've identified the issues, you can come up with a 'duty list' that could include rules like: If you finish something - whether it's shower gel or a jar of peanut butter - please rinse it out, recycle it and pop it on the shopping list; When you have a bath or shower, or brush your teeth in the sink, please clean it afterwards; If you see the bin's full, please empty it.

TEAM UP TO TIDY UP

'Make sure everything in your house, from school bags to opened letters, has a home that everyone knows about,' says Fiona. 'Make it a rule that everyone returns items after use. This doesn't have to be immediately - it's OK to let kids be imaginative and experimental and allow mess to happen - but have a team tidy-up at some point. It doesn't have to be a boring chore: put on some music and set a time limit to add fun. The same applies to mealtimes - get everyone into the habit of clearing the dining table so it doesn't always fall to one person.'

LET IT GO

If you think you'll have trouble giving up the control that running the home gave you, think again. 'It's nice to feel indispensable, but it's much more rewarding to feel part of a great team,' says Fiona. 'And it's no fun being around a control freak! In fact it can very quickly disempower everyone else in the family.'

Teamwork makes for a happier home, and getting kids involved gives them a sense of pride and achievement. It also gives you the chance to enjoy more me-time. Now, how about running yourself that bath?

WORDS KIM JONES ILLUSTRATION BROOK VALENTINE 'According to a survey by cleaning product company Spontex.

