



HOW TO SPLIT THE CHORES SO EVERYONE IS HAPPY

WHETHER YOU HAVE A BUSY PARTNER, LAZY ROOMMATES, OR MESSY KIDS, IT'S STILL POSSIBLE TO FIND A FAIR DIVISION OF LABOR IN YOUR HOME. GRAB THE PEOPLE YOU LIVE WITH AND GET READY FOR A LIFE-CHANGING HOUSEHOLD AUDIT. (IF YOUR ROOMMATE IS A DOG, WE'VE GOT NOTHING.)

BY ANNA MALTBY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ASIA PIETRZYK



I HAVE A GENERALLY TERRIBLE MEMORY, but if one thing has seared itself into my brain, it's the household chores the people I've cohabited with have done poorly—or left for me to do, no questions asked. There were the piles of body hair the two guys I lived with in college left on the bathroom floor. There were the dishes another roommate left in the sink after near-nightly cooking experiments. And nowadays there's the sticky residue I discover on our white countertops (side note: Never get white countertops) after my husband has “cleaned” the kitchen.

That's not to say I'm any kind of angel when it comes to housework. I rarely take out the compost bin. I have a tendency to clean out the lint catcher after doing a load of laundry—then promptly leave the wad of lint on top of the dryer rather than throw it in the wastebasket that's literally four feet away. And I act like an entitled, grumpy teen when I think the lion's share of the housework is falling on my shoulders, even though I haven't explicitly communicated that I want help.



We can laugh about it (sometimes), but dividing up household labor in a way that feels fair to all members is no joke. Bad situations with a “roommate”—whether yours is someone you’re romantically involved with, related to, or not—are more than annoying; they can breed toxicity in your relationship. “In today’s world, almost everybody has too much to do. People are feeling overwhelmed by work and by how much they have to do in the family. If someone doesn’t seem to be doing their fair share, however an individual defines that for the couple, it is a tinderbox,” says Ellen Galinsky, president of the Families and Work Institute

and a senior research adviser to the Society for Human Resource Management. In a survey of recently divorced people, disagreeing about housework was cited as one of the top three reasons for the dissolution of the marriage. Chore-related arguments ranked right below infidelity and drifting apart. Even if you and your partner have agreed you’ll take on more of the household chores, it can be challenging to work out what that means in reality.

A fair division of housework is not just about avoiding resentment, disagreements, and break-ups. For women who work, it can significantly influence career decisions and opportunities. While 43 percent of women who share responsibilities evenly with their partner aspire to become

top executives, only 34 percent of women who handle the majority of housework and childcare have the same aspiration, according to a 2016 McKinsey & Company–LeanIn.org study. And a 2015 study from the same group found that at every professional level, women were at least nine times as likely as men to say they do more childcare and at least four times as likely to say they do more chores. With so many women serving as chairperson and CEO at home (not to mention gender-based workplace discrimination and poor support for working parents), it’s no surprise that women are still underrepresented on every rung of the corporate ladder.

So is the goal a clean 50/50 split? Maybe not. All the experts I spoke to agreed that 50/50 simply doesn’t exist—and that’s OK. “The notion of 50/50 implies that things are equal, but it’s always shifting,” says Galinsky. “We’ve got to give ourselves a little slack.” Much more important than minute-by-minute division of labor are the following make-or-break factors that have a huge impact on whether your home feels harmonious.

How do the other people in your life divide things up?

If you’re surrounded by couples, families, or roommates who seem to happily clean the bathrooms together every weekend, it’s going to feel pretty awful if you’re scrubbing the tub solo. “People assess their relationships in rela-

tion to others, and the more often others share a task, the worse it feels for you not to share it,” says Daniel Carlson, PhD, assistant professor of family and consumer studies at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. The reverse is true too: If your husband joyfully handles your kids’ bathtime routine every night while your friends’ partners have never wielded a rubber ducky, he’s going to look awesome.

Do you have kids, how did you get them, and who took parental leave, if anyone?

Parenthood adds a slew of new chores to a household and, along with them, a slew of new stressors. For heterosexual couples who both work, chances are good that if either parent gets paid leave, it’s the mom—and that sets a pattern it’s hard to break out of. “Women who take time off following a birth end up doing more housework while they’re at home, and dads tend to engage even more in the labor force to provide for their families,” says Carlson. That’s certainly true for me: When I was on maternity leave, I handled laundry, since I knew my husband would appreciate a little extra time with the baby when he was home from work. One year later, I’m still doing six loads of laundry for every one he does. “Even though we’re seeing both men and women embrace the notion of gender equality, we see this pressure toward more conventional behavior. It’s about the widespread lack of paternity leave and the workplace culture that assumes employees are always available,” says Carlson.

One category of parents who may be happier with how they

WHAT KIND OF UNHAPPY ROOMMATE ARE YOU?

Communicating about your housework situation is key, but it’s also important to hold up a mirror and examine the ways you might be contributing to the issue.



The imaginary delegator

You’re annoyed your partner didn’t wash the windows—even though you’ve never had a discussion about it.

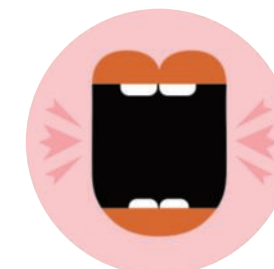
THE FIX: Next time you’re grumbling, bring it up (kindly). They might be happy to do it if asked.



The DIYer

You take care of pretty much everything because it’s just easier that way. Maybe you do a better job too.

THE FIX: Using the worksheet on page 127, discuss the tasks you’d like some help with. Then let yourself be helped.



The drill sergeant

You bark orders every time you notice a dirty plate sitting in the sink.

THE FIX: Surprise attacks foster resentment. It’s OK if you have a handful of issues to chat about with your housemate—just address them all at once, when things don’t feel heated.



The helpless helper

Your partner does so much that when you chip in, you get frustrated because you can’t find supplies and aren’t sure how things work.

THE FIX: Suggest you work together to find systems that feel logical to both. And take over some duties: Better to be a partner than a “helper.”

FARM IT OUT

Shocking exactly no one, researchers at Harvard Business School found that people who spent more money on time-saving services, like house cleaners, were more satisfied in their relationships. It doesn't have to be a ton of dough: The researchers found that spending even \$100 to \$200 a month increased happiness.

Thanks to digital marketplaces like TaskRabbit, it's easier than you might think to find helping hands in a pinch. We asked TaskRabbit for average hourly rates for the top 10 most popular tasks across the United States. (TaskRabbit workers set their own rates.)



ORGANIZATION
\$22-\$50



FURNITURE ASSEMBLY
\$31-\$55



CLEANING
\$35-\$58



YARD WORK & REMOVAL
\$35-\$70



MINOR HOME REPAIRS
\$38-\$60



PAINTING
\$41-\$68



HEAVY LIFTING
\$41-\$70



MOUNTING
\$45-\$65



ELECTRICAL WORK
\$50-\$80



PLUMBING
\$55-\$85

PRO TIP
Can't hire backup? List tasks you're unable to get to. Keep it for when friends or family offer to help.

CLEANING CZAR



divvy things up, research finds: adoptive parents. That's partly because of the absence of pregnancy and breastfeeding—both parents start out on a more equal playing field—but it's also possible that the process of adopting a child can help create a stronger partnership. "People who may have dealt with miscarriages and infertility and IVF and the adoption process and are still together—they're very resilient," says Abbie

Goldberg, PhD, a professor of psychology at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, who studies parenthood, relationship quality, and well-being among different types of families. "Couples who've been through this long journey and haven't broken up can sometimes be set up to be a really great team."

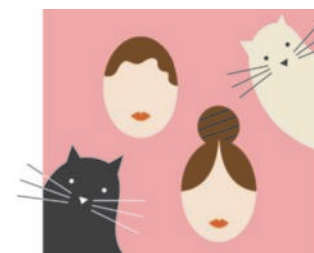
What's your work situation?

If both partners work full-time or if one partner works and the other stays at home, it should (theoretically at least) be relatively easy to decide how to allocate chores: In the first case, the couple try to share things equally; in the second, the stay-at-home partner takes on significantly more. The hardest scenario, particularly for straight



THANK YOU FOR SHARING

It's (very!) possible to be pleased with how chores are divvied up in your house. These *Real Simple* readers showed us how it's done.

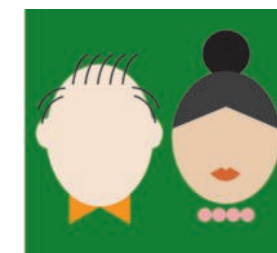


The divide & conquer couple

EMERIE, 32 / PHOTOGRAPHER / OHIO / LIVES WITH HER WIFE

"My wife and I agreed early on to do the chores the other hated most. For me, that was floors (the worst!), and for her, that's the bathroom. As we've lived together, we've discovered that things simply get done more effectively if one person is the go-to. But when we get busy or caught up in life and the housework piles up, we offer to pitch in for the other."

WORDS OF WISDOM: "A fresh and sincere thank-you is the foundation of a good partnership, no matter how many times you've said it before."

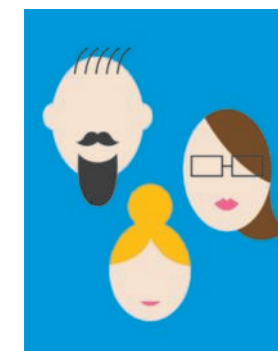


The seasonal workers

MARIA, 43 / WEB CONTENT EDITOR / QUEBEC / LIVES WITH HER HUSBAND

"My husband is a landscaper, so in the summer, when he works long hours, I do more of the daily tidying; in the winter, he does it. On weekends, we take a morning to change sheets, vacuum, dust, mop, and buy groceries."

WORDS OF WISDOM: "Don't fixate. Your partner might not be doing the one job you want done but might be doing a bunch of other helpful things you didn't notice."



The modern marriage

PAT, 40 / BIOMEDICAL ELECTRONICS TECHNICIAN / ALABAMA / LIVES WITH HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER, 8

"I do all the cooking and most of the cleaning, yard work, and maintenance. I pick up my daughter from school and make sure she gets her homework done. My wife is in charge of the financials, laundry, and planning and scheduling everything."

WORDS OF WISDOM: "Don't keep score."



The team of two

SANDRA, 67 / RETIRED / PENNSYLVANIA / LIVES WITH HER HUSBAND

"We work together. I clean the bathrooms and kitchen, and my husband dusts and moves the furniture to the middle of the room so I can vacuum, and then he pushes the furniture back. Now that we're both retired, I cook and he clears."

WORDS OF WISDOM: "I have fibromyalgia, and there are times when I can't do it all. I've learned my limits, and my husband understands."



All hands on deck

CARLA, 41 / "MOM BOSS" / TEXAS / LIVES WITH HER HUSBAND, FIVE CHILDREN (AGES 1 THROUGH 24), AND 2-YEAR-OLD GRANDDAUGHTER

"Our housework is divided up across all members of our family. I do a thorough cleaning on Friday so we are all set for the weekend, and my husband cleans on Sunday so we are ready for the week. Throughout the week, the older kids are responsible for keeping their rooms clean, feeding the dog, taking out the garbage, and wiping counters in the bathrooms and kitchen as they are used."

WORDS OF WISDOM: "It's about teaching a sense of responsibility as well as not getting to a place of resentment. I don't want anyone to feel like they do everything all the time, including me."

ICONS FROM NOUN PROJECT: BMI, JUNILIEFF; BOX SYMBOLS, RUDEZ, STUDIO; LUIS PRADO, LASTSPARK; BECCA, JENIE TOMBOC, PROSYMBOLS, JOEARTCON, CREATIVECUBE



YES, YOUR KIDS CAN HELP

“They will resist, drag heels, and often do a crummy job,” says Laura Kastner, PhD, author of *Getting to Calm: The Early Years*. “But it’s our responsibility to prepare them for life, and life is full of necessary drudgery. We should get their input on when and what but not whether.”

Toddlers can...

- Hang their coat on low hooks
- Put dirty clothes in the hamper
- Put toys in a bin
- Pour kibble into a pet’s bowl
- Categorize recyclables

Elementary school kids can...

- Put away their school gear
- Clear the table and load the dishwasher
- Clean the bathroom sink and tub
- Vacuum
- Dust
- Clean the toilet
- Do yard work
- Take garbage to the curb
- Help prepare meals
- Walk the dog
- Scoop the litter box
- Help select gifts for family and friends
- Make their lunch for school (by fourth or fifth grade)

Tweens can...

- Mop the floor
- Do the laundry
- Organize their closet
- Make lunch
- Care for younger siblings (after taking a baby-sitting safety class)
- Clean the refrigerator and stove
- Wash windows
- Help you with small projects when they visit you at work
- Purchase gifts for family and friends

Teens can...

- Clean the garage
- Mow the lawn
- Grocery shop
- Plan and make dinner

PRO TIP

It’s not cheating to give extra help to kids, especially young ones. Cheer them on and keep them company.

couples, is when one partner—typically the male—works full-time and the other—typically the female—works part-time. “Things are much less clear-cut. There’s an expectation that she’s going to pitch in more, in terms of childcare or housework. But where does that stop? It’s very hard to negotiate what ‘a little bit more’ looks like,” says Goldberg. “In those couples, women are more likely to be dissatisfied. They feel like they’re just doing everything.”

How do you share powder-keg tasks?

Carlson’s most recent research looked at how specific housework tasks affect relationship quality among middle- and low-income heterosexual couples. His team found that couples today are much more likely to share most routine chores than couples were in the past. They also learned that it’s especially critical how partners divide two particular tasks: dishwashing and shopping. Women who wash all or nearly all the dishes are more likely to report relationship trouble and worse sex than women whose partners handle at least some of the dishes. Why? Well, to begin with, washing dishes is gross (seriously!). It’s also thankless. “Everyone praises you for cooking a good meal. No one praises you for the clean silverware,” says Carlson. But when you share dishwashing duties—one person washes, one dries—it’s a chance to catch up, connect, and feel like a team. In fact, for women, washing dishes with a partner leads to more happiness than sharing any other household task.

For men, the key task seems to be shopping. While the effect isn’t as strong as with women and

dishwashing, it’s interesting (and a bit counterintuitive) that men are slightly less happy in their relationship when their partner does most of the shopping. If you’re the mayor of the supermarket, you might want to discuss a more even grocery split.

How do you show appreciation for your partner’s or kids’ efforts?

In my less charitable moments, I hesitate to thank my husband for picking up the living room—after all, no one really thanks me for putting away the baby’s toys and scrubbing sweet potato off the floor. But the experts say that’s a missed opportunity. “If you’re doing a ton around the house but

your partner is telling you every day, ‘Thank you for making a delicious meal, thank you for cleaning up my mess,’ that mitigates the resentment you might feel toward your partner,” says Goldberg.

Married friends of mine in Chicago give each other silly job titles: Czar of Laundry, Head of Waste Management, Tax Preparer, Weeknight Line Cook. It’s a fun way to acknowledge that the person doing that task is taking on important work. “Demonstrating to people that you value them is one of the most important, funda-

WOMEN WHO WASH ALL OR NEARLY ALL THE DISHES ARE MORE LIKELY TO REPORT RELATIONSHIP TROUBLE AND WORSE SEX.

mental things you can do,” says Tiffany Dufu, author of *Drop the Ball: Achieving More by Doing Less*. “It’s not about the task; it’s about the person. Anyone you’ve signed up to do life with is deserving and worthy of gratitude, and it goes a very, very long way.”

Are you a “gatekeeper”?

Helping someone out is no fun if that someone looks over your shoulder the whole time, corrects your technique, or redoes it all when you’ve finished. That’s called gatekeeping, and it’s a major issue when it comes to housework. “The person who is responsible for a task assumes a psychological responsibility, and that person can often be critical of the other person doing the task, because they aren’t doing it the same way. And that pushes the other person away from doing it,” says Galinsky. When it comes to childcare, gatekeeping has the additional side effect of depriving your coparent of time and bonding opportunities with your kids.

Opening the metaphorical gates and allowing your partner to develop a unique approach may even help you discover a new, better way to do things. Take Dufu, for instance. She normally wakes up an hour before her kids so she can get ready and then get





them ready. While she was on her book tour last year, her husband took over the morning routine. “I was thanking him for giving up so much sleep for me, and he said, ‘Thanks for the gratitude, but I’m not giving up any sleep,’” says Dufu. She couldn’t imagine how he was getting by without waking up at the crack of dawn. “When he explained, my mouth fell open,” she says. “He gets up at the same time he always does, and on his way to the bathroom, he wakes up the kids and says, ‘In 45 minutes, I need you at the front door with breakfast in your stomach, hair and teeth brushed, homework in your backpack, and coat and shoes on. Mom is not here, and I do not have time to get you guys ready.’ It turns out they can do that!”

Most important, how well do you communicate?

While we might like to imagine a world where household duties just magically fall into place, in reality they won’t get sorted without an open dialogue with your partner, roommate, or kids—or more likely, an ongoing series of dialogues. One strategy is to list every task you can think of, note who does it, and rate how satisfied you feel with that arrangement. Then share your notes. (A worksheet to guide you is on the opposite page.)

Conversations like these are one reason same-sex couples

are somewhat more likely than straight couples to feel their division of chores is fair, notes Goldberg. Why are they better at chatting it out? When partners are of the same sex, they’re less likely to fall back on traditional gender roles and make assumptions about who will do what. “There’s a better chance these choices will be thought about, talked about, and most important, perhaps done based on preference, ability, and natural inclination,” says Goldberg.

In heterosexual relationships, the consequences of not having these conversations tend to affect women more. “Women often get the short end of the stick. Unless we’re intentional about the decisions we’re making, we’ll operate based on default norms,” says Dufu. Not talking about it and not sharing tasks well are also missed opportunities to deepen your bond with your partner or children.

I’ve certainly found that to be true. The most meaningful and fair-feeling division of household labor my husband and I have experienced? Taking care of our son, Aadi, who’s 1 year old. We truly share childcare—diaper changes, feeding, early wake-ups, bedtime—as evenly as possible, and that’s a beautiful thing. It means we spend lots of time together and with Aadi; we both appreciate all the effort the other makes to ensure the baby is fed, clean, clothed, and happy; and we both get to admire the strength of our partner growing into a parent.
























It’s almost enough for me to stop worrying about those blasted white countertops.

THE GREAT CHORE AUDIT

When you’re ready for a discussion, tear out this page, make a copy (or visit realsimple.com/choreworksheet to print an extra), and fill it out with the person you share most of the household chores with. Then talk through each item together and figure out whether your approach needs to shift.

PRO TIP
Do this when you aren’t fuming about chores, says Galinsky.

CIRCLE WHO YOU THINK DOES EACH TASK AND, ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5, HOW HAPPY YOU ARE WITH THE ARRANGEMENT. USE THE BOTTOM ROW TO FILL IN TASKS THAT ARE UNIQUE TO YOUR HOUSEHOLD.

 MAKING BEDS MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 VACUUMING MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 CLEANING BATHROOMS MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 FOOD PREPARATION MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 DISHWASHING MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 DUSTING MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5
 DEEP CLEANING MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 TAKING OUT GARBAGE & RECYCLING MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 CHILDCARE MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 OUTDOOR WORK MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 CHAUFFEURING KIDS MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 SHOPPING FOR KIDS' NECESSITIES MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5
 SCHOOL & CAMP COMMUNICATION MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 PET CARE MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 LAUNDRY MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 GROCERY SHOPPING MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 CAR MAINTENANCE MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 REPAIRS AROUND THE HOUSE MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5
 FINANCIAL TASKS MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 PREPARATION FOR EVENTS & ACTIVITIES MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 BUYING PRESENTS FOR FRIENDS & FAMILY MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 MAKING SOCIAL PLANS MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 MAKING TRAVEL PLANS MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	 MAKING MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5
MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5	MOSTLY ME SHARED MOSTLY PARTNER NO ONE 1 2 3 4 5

DUSTING ICON: GETTY IMAGES; FROM NOUN PROJECT; FOCUS LAB; ANDREAS KIRMA; ALERMA; LYNN CHANG; ALEX DE STASIO; ICONS PRODUCER; PAUSEOB; CHANUT IS INDUSTRIES; ANBILERU ADALERU; EUCALYP; VECTORS MARKET; KEVIN; BEN DAVIS; JOEARTCOON; ANBILERU ADALERU (2); ARTHUR SHLAIN; DINOSOFT LABS; OKSANA LATYSHEVA; DEEMAK DAKSINA; BLAIR ADAMS; FARGRAPHIC; HRFA