

HELPING

Helping, As Part of Your Planbook

Helping around the home is an essential part of any Waldorf curriculum. It can be very difficult when transitioning to a Waldorf approach to parenting to remember to have your child share in your chores. Use this space in the planbook as a daily reminder – list specific tasks your child can be a part of each day. Or, if you are already accustomed to sharing your home chores with your child, simply fill this section in after the day is done.

An Example:

My Painting Triumph

We moved into this house ten days before my first daughter was born. Then 20 months later came baby number two, and baby number three followed in short order just 14 months later. The house we bought had been a foreclosed home, in decent repair but badly in need of a fresh coat of paint. Every room throughout the house was the same chipped marked-up dingy light-sucking off-white color.

Now, nearly four years later, we are preparing the house to be a rental property and painting has finally moved up to the top of our to-do list. Make that my to-do list, rather, as my husband has already moved into our next home and is getting it ready. So I am here with three children – a preschooler, a toddler, and an infant – and not much painting has been getting done. Not any painting, in fact. My husband comes by twice a week to see us and keeps asking me, “When are you going to get some painting done? All you need to do is just get started. Do it when the kids are asleep...” This is hilarious to me since it is possible, but not probable, that all three children will nap at the same time (and if they do I grab the chance to take a shower) and in the evenings I go to bed early (I know there are lots of industrious people who are shaking their heads at this but, sorry, that’s just the way it is). I’m also not an early riser, so there’s no way I can do a little painting before the children wake up. In short, when they’re awake, I’m awake and when they’re not, I’m not. So how can I paint?

Yesterday I finally had my break-through.

To give my husband the proper credit, he was right that all I had to do was to just get started. It was remembering that I had to paint that was causing me the biggest problem. He had already set up the painting room for me, a back bedroom, with plastic laid down carefully and all the painting equipment we had arranged. There was also a child-proof lock on the door. As I said before, I’m by my children’s side nearly all day long so, since they didn’t go in that room, I didn’t either. I never even remembered it existed until those few times a week that he asked me how the painting was going. I felt guilty, I hemmed and hawed, and then, inevitably, it flew right back out of my mind. I decided that the only way to get that painting done was if it was staring me right in the face and there was no way I could forget. That meant that the painting room had to stop being off-limits and not child-safe and become a lived-in room. I took up all the plastic he had laid down, all the rollers and handles, all the brushes, the cans of paint, and moved them down to the laundry room. Then I set that room up as my bedroom

(this was not difficult since we are in essence camping at this house; all I needed to move was my air mattress and a vase of flowers). Last night before I went to bed I took a 2 inch roll of masking tape and taped one wall. Just one wall because I didn't know how quickly the painting would progress, if at all (sometime my bright ideas don't exactly work out as planned) and I didn't want to get in over my head. And then I went to bed.

This morning I got out what I considered to be my painting equipment. This is based, not on what Steve had set out for me, but on what I myself felt would do the trick. I'm a great believer in forging my own path while he is a great believer in using the modern solution (this is due to his optimism that all of our modern solutions are based on generations of time-consuming profoundly scientific analysis, as the human race works together improving each step of a common task to find the most efficient method and tools possible; and, of course, these time-tested and perfected universally-accepted materials can be located at any nearby store) – in short, nearly all the painting equipment we had I disregarded. My final list of painting tools was this:

2 inch roll of masking tape	hardware store
1 inch brush	hardware store
beach pail	Ikea
can of paint, paint can opener, paint stirrer	hardware store
collection of craft sponges	AC Moore / Michaels
large bath sponge	Linens 'n Things
laundry room sink	

I put the two little ones to bed at naptime and let my older daughter stay in the room with me; she's old enough not to touch the wet paint. Then I got our metal beach pail (water-tight) and my collection of sponges (these are the small cut sponges sold in craft stores with the stencilling materials – I also had a large bath sponge, unused). I opened the paint and stirred it, then poured some into my pail (I did this in the laundry room so the open can of paint wouldn't be temptation in the painting room, nor could it be tripped over). Following the directions included with my craft sponges, I dipped the first sponge in water to soften it and squeezed it out fully, then began to apply paint to the bedroom walls.

Some thoughts:

- 1) the sponge absorbs the paint better than a brush and is less likely to drip; hold the sponge above the paint for a minute to see if it does drip before you apply it to your wall – if so, press it against the inside of the pail to remove the excess
- 2) when the paint begins to wick its way up to the top of the sponge where your fingers are, you can easily rinse it clean, squeeze it dry thoroughly, and continue to use it or switch to a different piece while the wet one dries slightly
- 3) painting takes on a nice rhythmic quality and the sponge becomes an extension of your hand; you feel connected to the painting process which I don't find when using a roller – I always feel rollers are some awkward extension of my arm which I can't control

- 4) the paint doesn't cover as thoroughly so several coats are needed but since the painting process is more pleasurable, this is hardly a problem
- 5) set-up and clean-up are easy so you are more likely to paint in small chunks of time
- 6) not having plastic on the floor makes the painting room seem more comfortable to be in, not so much like an alien work zone, and the room can be used in the evenings if you paint in the mornings
- 7) not having plastic on the floor also causes you to work more slowly and be more careful which adds to the rhythm of the painting – it also means you are less likely to drip paint and not notice, then walk in it later on
- 8) rinsing a sponge completely free of paint is extremely easy, as is cleaning out a pail – in fact, since you have already got a sponge in your hand, use the sponge to help get the pail and your hands clean
- 9) younger children can be very helpful when painting is done this way:
 - they can monitor the floor for accidental drips; when a drip happens they can quickly clean it up with a wet paper towel
 - they can get the next sponge damp and squeezed out for you when you're ready for a new one
 - they can rinse the pail and clean the sponges in the bathtub, then take a bath afterward to get any paint off themselves
 - they can hand you the pail of paint after you reposition yourself to reach high-up spots
- 10) older children can easily help paint the lower parts or the middle of a wall – make sure they are old enough to know how to test the sponge and remember to make sure it is not overly saturated with paint before they lift it out of the pail
- 11) the pail is smaller, more light-weight, and easier to hold than a large paint bucket
- 12) beach pails are inexpensive enough that you can afford to have one pail for each child, which you probably would want to have anyway – sponges are inexpensive as well and easily replaced if torn
- 13) I used the small sponges on my trial day but a large bath sponge can easily be used; cut it in half first so that you have a flat side to apply the paint with
- 14) sponging leaves a nice texture, unlike the streaky look of using a brush, and they don't spatter like rollers can
- 15) this is a wonderful way to introduce sponges or a unit about the animals under the sea – what is a sponge made of? where does it come from?

- 16) give your children a basket of sponges for their imaginative play – these can be bought or sold at a pretend store, become characters (they make wonderful animals), or be used in pretending to paint the walls, wash the walls, dishes, or floor, take a bath, etc.
- 17) even the youngest child can get in on the action by being given several sponges and a bucket of water to “paint” a dry section of the wall, help clean the floor after the painting is done, or to use in water play outside or in the tub
- 18) instead of closing off the room completely to let it dry, put a baby gate across the door – this way the children can see their work and feel a sense of accomplishment

In conclusion, the materials I used for my house painting project are inexpensive, fun things I would still like to have on hand after the painting is complete. I don't mind storing them as they can both (sponges and pail) be used in so many other ways and therefore have earned their keep – a major priority for me. My success in this realm has given me, and hopefully you as well, added encouragement and inspiration as to the positive results which can be achieved when you set up your house and your world so that your children can be involved as much as possible.

“Painting the Gate”

from Talking Like the Rain

ed. by X. J. Kennedy, illus. by Jane Dyer

I painted the mailbox. That was fun.
I painted it postal blue.
Then I painted the gate.
I painted a spider that got on the gate.
I painted his mate.
I painted the ivy around the gate.
Some stones I painted blue,
and part of the cat as he rubbed by.
I painted my hair. I painted my shoe.
I painted the slats, both front and back,
all their beveled edges, too.
I painted the numbers on the gate –
I shouldn't have, but it was too late.
I painted the posts, each side and top,
I painted the hinges, the handle, the lock,
several ants and a moth asleep in a crack.
At last I was through.
I'd painted the gate
shut, me out, with both hands dark blue
as well as my nose, which,
early on, because of a sudden itch,
got painted. But wait!
I had painted the gate.

May Swenson