

Childhood Chores Teach Responsibility

Chores allow children an early and sustained opportunity to experience responsibility. Independence and self-sufficiency in life are tied, ultimately, to mastery of two types of responsibility: personal and social responsibility. The process of identifying, accepting and acting to satisfy personal and social responsibility must be learned, and children learn this process when their parents accept the responsibility of teaching it to them.

Some Lessons Are Easier Than Others

Most parents experience no difficulty in creating opportunities for the development of personal responsibility in their children. Beginning with toilet training, parents usually assign tasks to their children that allow them to progress toward independence, such as washing their own faces, brushing their own teeth, dressing themselves, completing homework and attending school. For the most part, children have no difficulty acknowledging the existence of personal responsibilities and accept them readily.

Parents often experience greater difficulty in developing opportunities for their children to acquire a sense of social responsibility. Assigning household chores is a way for parents to teach children about social responsibility by employing the most fundamental and easily accessible unit of society: the family.

How Children Benefit From Chores

The assignment of household chores serves several important teaching functions regarding social responsibility. It allows the child to experience both a sense of contribution to the family and a sense of accomplishment—and, in turn, it allows a sense of pride in that accomplishment. Pride is the key ingredient in the development of self-respect, which is the foundation for good mental health and happiness in life. Moreover, contributing to the family and feeling good about doing so strengthens the child's connection to the family.

Teaching children to accept social responsibilities within their family is the very best way of preparing them to accept and satisfy the numerous social responsibilities they will encounter outside the family as they grow older and progress toward independence. When the child becomes a teenager or young adult, successful negotiation of social responsibilities outside the family is important for many reasons, including the opportunity to re-experience a sense of contribution, pride, self-respect and a strong, constructive connection to society.

"But My Friend Doesn't Have To..."

Unfortunately, chores are boring. After the novelty has worn off, many young children and most teenagers complain about having to complete them. It is interesting that parents who would never think of relaxing the requirements of personal hygiene, homework and school attendance will frequently allow their children to avoid household chores.

It is difficult to say why many of today's parents have loosened their grip on such a readily available and effective teaching tool. Maybe they are unaware of the relationship of chores to the development of social responsibility. Maybe they don't see chores as a means of strengthening family ties. Maybe they are unaware of the critical role social responsibility will play in their child's teenage and adult life.

No Payment!



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Assign your children appropriate household chores beginning at a very early age. It will not hurt them. In fact, a sense of social responsibility could even save a life if, for example, your teenage son or daughter chooses not to drink and drive. Do not pay your children for completing their chores. The purpose of chores is to teach children about their social responsibilities to their family and equip them in the best possible manner to meet the many social responsibilities that confront teenagers and adults. The value of chores resides in the lessons learned from accomplishing them: a sense of pride, the development of self-respect and the experience of being connected to others who depend on and value the child's contribution. Payment defeats the purpose.

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