

Chores Are Contributions to the Family

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What if there was a study dedicated to unearthing the secrets to a happy and purposeful life? In fact, just such a study has been carried for the past seven decades with students at the Harvard Medical School. Starting in 1939, the study examined the childhood events and circumstances that impacted the quality of relationships and happiness in life as the students aged. Connecting with them every two years, one of the clear messages from this study was that professional success in life comes from having done chores, rolling up one's sleeves and pitching in to do even the unpleasant things. Having the attitude of "contributing to the whole" goes a long way in the work place.

The word chores often has a negative connotation for children. But really, chores are contribution to the family. When we approach it from the point that chores help make the family run, children can feel more important while contributing to the wellbeing of the family. Children need to be needed and learning responsibility through chores builds self-esteem.

Start small with young ones. Preschoolers can help set the table and it provides a good math lesson. Ask, "How many forks or plates do we need?" Three and four year old children can carry their own plate and cup over to the sink after a meal. Kindergartners can help with laundry, folding small towels and match up the socks. It is important to do the tasks together with them and give lots of praise, appreciating their effort. Don't tell them what they did wrong. Model the best way to do it and praise even it is less than perfect.

With older kids, you can make a list of the chores that need to be done and let them have a choice, let them rotating them each week. One way to help children elementary age and above understand what it takes to make a family run smoothly is to post a large piece of paper on the wall. Ask everyone to contribute by writing down all of the things that keeps the family running. Leave it there for a few days and make sure to include items like jobs to make the money, shopping for groceries, planning meals, taking the car to the garage, etc. Then, hold a family meeting and talk about the items on the list. Discuss who does various jobs and how it is too much for mom and dad. Everyone is needed to contribute and ideally, discuss how each of the children/youth can help the family

As kids get older, they can handle more responsibility. This is an excellent time for them to learn life skills that they will need when they are on their own like doing laundry, cooking meals, helping with meal planning and grocery shopping, making a budget and planned activities for a family vacation and so much more. Make sure that they know how important their contributions are and that you couldn't do it without them.

Regular chores are not paid. They are contributions to help the family run smoothly. Being paid for chores robs them of the dignity of holding up their fair share of the family work load. However, you can have a list of extra chores that they can get paid for--you can even ask them to put in a bid for various task.

Give kids a time period to complete the chores; for instance, have them finished before the soccer game on Saturday morning or before dinner time. With younger children, ask them would you like to do this before or after dinner. Giving an allowance is important so that they get the real world experience of learning to budget.

As kids get older, they can have more responsibility and accountability. If they forget to do their chores, maybe they have to pay you for doing their chores. This is one reason for them to get an allowance. Or if they are younger, they can pay with toys or with a chore of your choice before they can do something that they enjoy like watching a show.