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7 Parenting Pitfalls When Trying to Establish Chores©

OK, you're about to make a concerted effort to get those kids of yours to do chores regularly...again. You know it's good to do, but it is so hard to do, and maintain. Quite frankly, you may not be sure you're up to try it again! If you resonate with this, you're normal!!!

This article is designed to help you avoid some of the common parenting pitfalls when establishing chores for your kids. Here goes...

1. **Thinking having your kids do chores is primarily about doing chores.**
What! Of course it is! Actually it is a smaller part of it. The much bigger and important question is:

How can I help my child learn important skills, personal responsibility, becoming part of a functioning household, following though, etc while at the same time building a strong collaborative relationship with my child?

The much more important piece is the relationship you have with your child. Almost anyone can intimidate, shame, or force a kid to do chores. This style creates resentment, more resistance, and wounds in both of you. It is extremely common to fall into this method of trying to get chores done because what we've tried hasn't worked, and quite frankly we don't know what else to do. If you've fallen into this, you are also normal. Sometimes a different outlook on what it's about can help shift how we see chores, and in turn, shifts how we relate to our child about this issue.

2. **Being so excited and/or convinced about the importance of having your kids do chores that you announce it in a big fanfare without involving your kids in it, or giving them choices.** One of the success factors in establishing chores as a regular and expected part of family life is having the kids “buy-in” somehow. Of course they will never buy-in that this horrible new idea of mom/dad’s is good. Give that one up! You can however, help them buy-in by having a choice in what chores they do. So here’s an example from our family. I told the kids that it was up to them to clean the bathroom they shared once a week (this was the non-negotiable part). The 4 basic chores in the bathroom we started with were:

- Scrubbing the counters
- Cleaning the toilet
- Changing the towels
- Cleaning the mirror

Our son took the counter and the mirror, and our daughter took the toilet and the towels. If they were not able to reach an agreement, the tasks could rotate weekly.

I also gave them a list of 10 other chores that needed to be done and told them they each needed to do 3 of these per week, and I would do the others. I helped them negotiate this. I then posted this on the refrigerator along with when it needed to be done, and the consequences if not done. Having some say in it made a huge difference. The process of talking to them about it also taught respect, negotiation skills, that some things were negotiable and some were not, and that there are consequences.

3. **Trying to share and/or enforce the chore plan in a harsh way through use of pressure, shame, etc.** More specifically, the following tactics do not work, make the relationship with your child suffer, and cause deep bitterness and resentment for all of you.

- *Yelling at your kids to get them to do chores.* We’ve all been there, so don’t beat yourself up. Rather look at this as a chance to learn a better way. It doesn’t work because there is an element of disrespect toward them which produces defensiveness. It also teaches them to wait until

the last minute, then mom/dad will yell at them, then they might do it...or better yet, mom and dad will give up and do it themselves.

- *Using shaming messages verbally or through looks of disgust to try to get them to do what they are supposed to.* What I mean by shaming is giving a message that comments on the character of your child, such as, “You’re lazy, selfish, don’t care about anyone but yourself, etc.” We only do this because either we’ve heard it ourselves as a kid, or are just fit to be tied and don’t know what else to do. In contrast, commenting on the behavior without the character slam is more effective. For example, “You haven’t emptied the dishwasher yet, and this needs to be done before dinner is available to you. Thanks.”
4. **Not following through with having the kids do chores, and/or not following through with the consequences you’ve set if they don’t.** This often happens when you don’t have a system in place. Don’t try to reinvent the wheel. Use www.chorechampions to take most of the guesswork out of this. We don’t have extra time to figure this out. The minimal cost will be worth your sanity, as well as your child’s development of moral character, skill building, and responsibility. Not following through can also happen because we’ve required too much too soon. It’s better to start with two chores and have it go well, than start with five and have it go horribly. You can always add more chores as your child gets older.
 5. **Forgetting to praise them for their work and/or only commenting on what they missed.** Especially with small children, only comment on the good they do. Don’t forget they don’t know how to do much, and everything is a learning curve for them. If their first attempts at helping are criticized, they will lose heart. You can gently point out how to complete the chore later as a way of teaching rather than criticism. Praise the quality of their work as well as how much it means to you that they followed through.
 6. **Expecting them to do it all right.** Remember they are on a learning curve, especially before the teen years. Most of the chores are all new to them and it takes a while to learn the skill, as well as grow in their ability to follow through with something they don’t really want to do.

7. **Forgetting what we were like as kids, especially around doing chores.** Most of us resisted, did a sub-par job, hoped our parents would do it for us, and procrastinated until the last moment. All this to say, while we want to shape our child's character, help them learn important skills and be a part of helping with the household, the resistance and maneuvering is normal. Those of us who didn't mind chores so much as a kid are the exception. Sometimes it's the way we were wired, and sometimes it is because we were intimidated by our parents, and complied out of fear.

I hope this was helpful. Think about it, try it out, and make it your own! It's worth the effort! For more tips go to my website www.EncouragingRelationships.com on the articles page and download my free article *Helpful Hints for Helping Your Kids Do Chores*.

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