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Helpful Hints for Helping Your Kids Do Chores©

1. Establishing structure around chores is very important because:

- **Helps Parents** - With our busy lives, having a basic structure helps us with the running of our households, and lowers our overall stress. It also helps us feel like we aren't in this all alone, that we are part of a team rather than a Servant or Slave Driver.
- **Helps Home Environment** - these types of routines help lower the overall stress of the home, creates an environment of safety and security rather than chaos, and makes room for fun and relating time rather than always putting out fires.
- **Helps Children** - These practices help children prepare for life in two major ways:

A. By developing Life Skills. Kids need to learn how to handle money, do household chores, and negotiate for what they desire, as well as persevere on difficult tasks even when they don't want to.

B. By developing their Character. A person's character largely determines how they will function in life, both in work and interpersonal relationships. Most of the problems people have in life result from character weaknesses. A major part of successful parenting is the process of helping children develop their character in hopes that their future will go well.

2. Always keep in mind the big picture:

- Kids don't know how to do anything at first and this is normal. They need to have the freedom to fail, and learn from their failures.
- Children need instruction without shame
- Instruction says, "You did a great job sweeping the floor. The job will completely do when the broom is put away." Shame says, "What's wrong with you? Don't you even care enough to finish the job? Put that broom away, NOW!" Instruction comments on the action, shame assassinates a person's character.

- Our job is to help them develop these life skills by being their Coach not their Drill Sergeant. Being a coach involves teaching them skills (or seeing to it that they learn from someone else if we are not able); encouraging them for their progress; and providing logical consequences to teach them when they do not follow through.
- The “tips” offered in this article are not meant to be ways to control your children to do what you want...but rather provide you ways to gently teach your children in order to build their character and life skills.
- If your overall relationship with your child is not emotionally close and safe, you will have many, many more problems in all these areas. When children’s emotional needs are not being met, they will try to let us know that they are in distress through their misbehavior. Whenever your child refuses to do his/her chores, keep in mind he/she might be resisting because of a valid emotional struggle.
- Combining instruction with love and grace can build the relationship with your child, build your child’s self-confidence, and develop his/her character. Teaching these skills is not something we as parents just have to do...it is what healthy parenting is all about!

3. Tips for Chores

A. Remember:

- This is a long learning process. We need to see it this way rather than as success / failure.
- Kids model what we do, not what we say. Do they see us keeping up with our chores? Do they see us have a happy attitude about it? Do they see us express satisfaction at how good it feels to get them done? Do they see us do a good job? Do they see us do what we need to do first (with a GOOD attitude) before the fun stuff?
- It is NORMAL for kids to not want to do chores. They need to be able to not like them, and still do them. This is a major reality of adulthood that many adults have not even mastered yet. Give them the freedom to struggle with not wanting to, but still doing them. “I know you don’t want to do your chores before you go to Emily’s. I know just how that feels. That is still what will need to happen, and I will be happy to drive you over when they are completed.”

B. Guidelines that up the chances of success:

- Do not pass judgment or criticize the performance of your child as he/she is trying to learn to do a chore. Comment on the positives, “Wow, you folded all those clothes!” rather than pointing out the parts that aren’t quite right, “You put the clothes in the wrong piles.” Being critical while they are still learning can be very discouraging and will kill their spirit of wanting to help and learn.
- Preschoolers begin “chores” by imitating us...doing what we are doing. They rarely decrease our workload, and this is normal. We want to focus on encouraging their desire to help, and complimenting them for their efforts. With time, they will master the skills.
- Five to Six year-olds can be given simple tasks such as cleaning up messes they make, help clean their rooms, making their beds (not strict standards), set the table, etc.
- Seven to Eleven year-olds can unload the dishwasher, empty the trash, fold laundry, sweep, dust, scrub the sinks, make their lunches, etc.
- Teenagers can add mowing the lawn, vacuuming, cleaning the whole bathroom, mopping, washing windows, weeding, doing their laundry, etc

4. Getting Started

If you would like to begin this with your kids, or renegotiate it here are some ideas:

- * Frame it as each of us “doing our fair share” as opposed to “helping” mom and dad. They need to see these chores as a normal part of contributing to the household.
- * Make a list of all the chores that need to be done to run the household. Include everything like working to earn money, paying the bills, driving family members to school and errands, going grocery shopping, etc. Write down everything you do for a week. Post on refrigerator, and ask others to add to the list of things they would like you to do for them. A few days later, have a family meeting to decide how to divide up the chores. Give your kids choices.
- * You’ll need to decide what works for you as far as daily chores versus weekly chores. Make it clear by when these chores need to be done. Examples of this might be “by Saturday at 4:00pm”, “before I drive you to your friends house”, or “before your next meal”, etc. Give a reasonable time period.

- Put a list on the refrigerator with each person's chores listed, and when these need to be completed
- We invite resistance when we don't give choices about chores, or when we demand they do then RIGHT NOW!
- If they do not do their chores, you can ask them if they would like to do them or pay out of their allowance to have another family member do them for them. If they have no money, you can either deduct the amount from next week's allowance, or repossess a toy to pay to have the chore done by someone else.
- The attitude in which we dole out the consequences is very important. Consequences need to be applied without anger. Remember, we are not punishing them, we are lovingly instructing them about consequences and responsibility. If we share consequences with anger, their focus comes off of themselves and their actions, and refocuses on us and how unfair we are.

"For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." 2 Thes 3:10

5. Realize that resistance and/or non-compliance on the part of your child or teen may be the result of struggles on the inside.

A. If your child is going through a hard time, or a time of transition in some way, he/she will express this pain in a variety of ways...some of which could be:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Resistance to do anything else that is draining (school, homework, chores, etc) since he/she is already tapped out.
- Anger, sadness, acting out which will make doing homework and chores hard.

A child's inner world (feelings, worries, etc) needs to be paid close attention to, otherwise your child will be suffering silently, while acting out his/her pain through his/her actions.

B. Before focusing exclusively on your child's problematic behaviors (including not doing chores), try asking yourself some questions:

- What stresses, losses, and/or changes is my child going through in his/her life? How serious (scale of 1 to 10) do I think it is, and how serious would my child say it is?

- Is there any chance that my child is trying to get attention from me (even negative attention) by resistance to doing homework, chores, following house rules?
- Am I gently consistent with my discipline, so that my child knows clear school and home expectations as well as consequences for non-compliance?
- How much one-on-one nurturing time does my child get? How much being listened to without interruption does he/she get?
- Would I be willing to work at consistency in discipline, encouragement, and affection? What would I be willing to commit to?

It is crucial that a child's emotional needs be met before he/she will be in the best shape to tackle school and household duties. If lacking, start here.

6. Encouragement for Today

- It's not too late to learn.
- Set small goals.
- Helping your kids develop life skills and a strong character is a huge gift to them
- The way you interact with your children in these areas can build and deepen your relationship with them.
- Ask God for help. You don't have to do this alone.
- Ask friends for help. Check in with one another to see how you are both doing. Share your successes and your frustrations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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