

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

Take the Chore out of Chores



BY KIM DeMARCHI

With summer here, it's time to get my children more involved in household chores. During the school year, between homework, sports, and family dinners, there isn't a

lot of time for them to help around the house. They definitely do some, but summer is when we raise our expectations of them. A lot of parents end up doing all the chores because it can be so much easier to just do them yourself. It's draining for parents to have to constantly nag their children to do their chores.

So why should children have to do chores? There are several reasons, the first simply to be a functional family. There is just too much work to do with only one or two parents carrying the load. If the room is clean, the homework folder can be found. If the clean folded laundry is put away, one can find the soccer uniform. Also, by learning how to do certain tasks, it builds competence in children. It also helps develop character traits such as taking ownership, having an internal sense of accountability, and being responsible. My favorite reason children should do chores is because it increases a sense of family cohesiveness and closeness. We all do our part; we all have a role; we are all in service to each other. I'm not the parent doormat, here to serve my royal children. The opposite is true as well...my children are not my servants. We all contribute in our family because we are a family. You certainly can't appreciate what someone does for you until you truly know what it takes to do it. Because my children know first hand what doing laundry entails: sorting, washing, moving it to the dryer, hang drying some items, taking them out of the dryer, sorting again, folding, and finally putting away, my children now have an appreciation for me and don't take everything for granted. I could, of course, just lecture them on how time consuming doing laundry is, but actually having them know it first hand is so much more beneficial. If they are particularly busy with

homework and sports, and I have some free time, I might fold their laundry for them and put it on their bed to put away. Talk about gratitude... it's a wonderful feeling to be appreciated!

Sometimes I think we should strike the word "chores" from our vocabulary because it has such a negative connotation for most children. Kids might call "chores" slavery or grunt work, but we might think about calling them responsibilities, jobs, duties, or life skills. Kids might react less defensively to "chores" and take more pride and ownership in them. Call it what you want ultimately, but I guess in the end, its more about the delivery and less about the name.

When our children aren't doing what we want them to do, most parents nag, nitpick, nudge, remind, coerce, bribe, and admonish. More or less we are saying, "You aren't doing it and I'm going to make you." Unfortunately, that is not productive, damages the relationship, and it takes the responsibility away from the child. When we start to hear moaning and groaning about doing their chores, the best thing parents can do is connect with their children. Connection before Correction. Empathize with their feelings. They want and need to feel heard and understood. Then you can brainstorm solutions to the problem. For example, if your child is complaining about having to vacuum, after empathizing with them, solutions might include:

- Choose or negotiate another chore
- Use headphones with your favorite music
- Break the task up... vacuum one room, take a break, etc...
- Trade jobs with a sibling
- Make it fun for the whole family... blast music and everyone clean
- Let them choose if they do it before or after basketball

Children DO better when they FEEL better.

Children can be given age appropriate

tasks at a very young age. Toddlers can be in charge of some self care items: getting dressed, putting their clothes in the hamper, taking their dishes to the kitchen counter. It not only is helpful to the parents, but more importantly, it builds their competence and confidence. Make sure, though, that expecting perfection is avoided. Parents aren't perfect and neither are children. More than the end product, appreciate their effort.

The spill may not be cleaned up perfectly, but they tried. Lastly, take time for training, which means teach them how to do particular tasks. A parent's definition of cleaning the bathroom is most definitely different than a child's. Children need guidance, encouragement, and the chance to fail and try again.

Parents will likely have more success in getting children to do chores, if they are creative in their execution.

- Family meetings brainstorm and write list of chores and let children pick their tasks. They will have more ownership because they were part of the problem solving.
- Do them together 1 hour Disco Sundays or everyone do yard work together.
- Job Wheel using a paper plate, divide into pie slices and write a chore on each. Add a spinner and let the child spin the wheel daily to get their job of the day.
- Switch it up let siblings clean each other's rooms
- Job jar "Go Fish" daily or weekly to fish chores out on slips of paper
- Job chart for older kids, can be a checklist of chores



- Ready, Set, Pick Up Everyone has 5 minutes to go around the house and put away 15 things.
- Job boards clothespin several jobs each day to a small board

Children do need to know there are some things in life that we just have to do. Those are called "nonnegotiables". We don't get to choose IF we do them or not. But, we do get to choose HOW we do them and OUR ATTITUDE when we do them.



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