

Getting Kids to Love Chores

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“Jonathan, its time to do your chores!” Mom has reminded him for the third time this morning, “Okay. Okay. I’ll do them at the next commercial, I promise” says Jonathan trying to buy time. “Jonathan, you’ll do it right now or you won’t be going to soccer practice this afternoon!” threatens mom.

Are you tired of yelling, bribing and threatening your kids to get them to do their chores? Many parents are just concerned about getting the job done. It is important that we shift our intent to one of wanting to shape our child’s character. When we make this shift we then can be inspirational to our children instead of nags and drill sergeants. Here is how:

1. Stress internal rewards.

When you do a chore share with your child how it makes you feel to get it done. For example, “My room was getting so cluttered that I was starting to feel not good about myself.” After he has heard you make several statements like this, start asking him questions that internally motivate him like, “How do you feel about your clean room?” Ask him questions that help him to look inside for the good feelings he has when he has done a job well. Versus saying “You are a good boy” which is external motivation.

Internal rewards have longer lasting effects than external rewards because he can draw on the good feelings he creates by doing “good works” for the rest of his life. External rewards on the other hand are shallow, fleeting and make your child dependent on the authority figure who dispenses rewards and punishments. External rewards create self-centered children who only do good works if there is something in it for him.

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2. Emphasize the joy of doing.

Again you want to model first and then relate it back to them so you might say, “I love how I feel after I have put my all into a project. I feel like I have really accomplished something.” Other words you could use are, “I feel like I really contributed or stretched myself or stuck through something that was not pleasant.”

3. Point out how good it feels to give 100 %.

Sometimes children do just enough to get by or do a sloppy job. When this happens, don’t do the job over for them or criticize their work, or give up on having them do chores. Instead, ask in a light tone of voice. “Did you give this project 100%?” If they say yes, challenge them to do one thing better in a light tone.

4. Teach the importance of being helpful.

Look for opportunities for your child to be helpful in their daily life. For example, if you see an elderly lady struggling with her groceries ask, “How could you be helpful?” When they have been helpful, make sure to ask them how they feel rather than simply praise them. Again, it is helpful to model the behavior several times before you expect them to demonstrate the concept.

Be sure to tell your child how valuable their work is to the whole family. For example, “Thank you for cleaning the family room. It is so much nicer to play games in a neat room.”

Don't talk about having to do chores. Talk about having opportunities to contribute or "Household Operations!"

5. Accentuate teamwork.

A lot more can get done in a short time if everyone works together. Play a game where you set the timer on for 15 minutes, put on loud music that makes you want to dance and see how much you can get done as a family in 15 minutes. You may need to do this at several intervals a day in order to get everything done. Short segments where you make work fun makes children feel more cooperative.

6. Teach self-reliance.

When we give children chores to do, we teach them to become dependent on an authority figure. Instead, frequently ask, "What needs to be done?" Then follow their lead. This also helps them develop a sense of ownership in the care of the home. Children often become compliant or defiant when there is an authority figure. We want them to become self-reliant.

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Another way children can feel self-reliant is to make their own list of what chores they need to do with a checklist for the week. (Younger children may need your help and draw pictures of their chores.) The chart then becomes their guide instead of you having to be the authority figure.

Children have a natural desire to want to help as long as they are not coerced. Make work fun by making a game of it, working together, and by accentuating internal rewards. For more help on chores and other parenting issue, take a parenting course in your area.

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