

FAMILY MATTERS

...because family does matter

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Roberta Rachel Omin, LCSW

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Teaching Your Children Chores and Responsibilities

Perplexed getting children to clean up after themselves, take responsibility for personal hygiene and join in doing household chores? Many parents promise an allowance to motivate their children. Much of the time this backfires. Child development experts as well as financial planners don't recommend linking an allowance to chores. How then do you help your children develop lasting responsibilities?

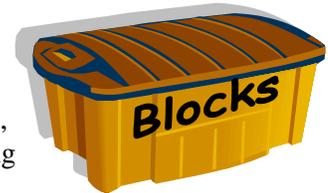
YOUNG CHILDREN

Three year olds can begin to learn, especially if they attend a nursery or day-care program. In the midst of fellow playmates, children clean up after an activity with the help and direction of the staff. They are taught to put toys in specific places, blocks on the block shelf; books on the book shelf; small toys in bins that hold certain items; play food and dress up clothes in the housekeeping corner and so forth. The following song (sung as a round) accompanies the cleanup:

Clean up, clean up,
Everybody, everywhere.
Clean up, clean up,
Everybody do your share.

If a child resists, the teacher may do 'hand-over-hand' to encourage compliance. It won't be long before he catches on. With persistence, each child learns *clean up follows an activity*. Why doesn't this happen at home?

It's to the parents' advantage to carry over this new skill at home. For starters, use the song at home. Second, toy chests are no longer appropriate since all the toys are dumped inside. It's essential that children have a particular place (their bedroom and the room they play in) and an organizing system (bins, containers, shelves) for all their belongings. Pictures/words can be put on the bins showing what goes inside them such as dolls, action figures, legos, puzzles and toy animals, etc. Teach your children how to sort and categorize their toys by putting them in the proper place.



ELEMENTARY AGED CHILDREN AND OLDER

As children get older, activities, areas of interest and accessories change. Storage spaces need to be updated. Discuss what chores need to be done and ask what responsibilities they would like to learn. Increase the responsibilities according to their abilities not an older sibling's or yours. Create a framework - decide the times and days the chores are to be completed by. Don't hang over them, but make sure they are done.

If children are unaccustomed to this expectation, they will test. Start off by praising them for responsibilities handled well, such as aspects of personal hygiene. Two rules of thumb: Give bite size tasks in the beginning; expect what is manageable and realistic. Then the chore becomes a HABIT. *Success breeds success.*



FOLLOW THROUGH and FOLLOW THROUGH some more

Consistent parental involvement is necessary. Science is showing 'witnessing' and validating strengthens brain activity and problem solving abilities. For example, with you present and possibly helping, your child can put toys away and brush their teeth before the bedtime routine and

story. For your older child, if their chore isn't completed as agreed upon, a predetermined logical consequence is carried out. If their room is not cleaned by Saturday morning they might not go to the next activity. Be calm, clear, firm and consistent - not threatening, yielding or nagging. An argument becomes a lose-lose power struggle. If your child needs to attend an event that would interfere with the responsibility discuss it in advance and make a new plan.

CHORE CHARTS

Chore charts are excellent visual prompts and a way to sign-off when the responsibility is completed. Stores like Staples carry lots of them. When I coach parents I often hear how charts don't work. They can only work if you bring your child's attention to them and follow through to the extent is needed. It won't work without your guidance. Parents who have their own difficulties with organization may have children with similar challenges. There's no way around this one. These parents must develop their own methods of follow through in order to help their children. Below is a sample chart for three age levels.

Youngest Age	Middle Age	Oldest Age
Personal care		
Brush teeth	The usual plus	The usual plus
Shower/bath	Apply deodorant	Acne medication
Put clothes in hamper	Wash hair	
Care of room		
Make bed	Clean desk	Clean in a more
Put away clean clothes	Straighten up room	comprehensive way
Household chores		
Set table	Take out recyclables	Fill/empty dishwasher
Water plants with help	Clear table, sweep floor	Make lunch

WHAT MAKES THIS WORK? IT ISN'T MAGIC...



Our subconscious takes 21 days of daily practice to ingrain a new behavior. A young child can put a sticker, star or check mark on the chart when the chore is done. An older child can initial a chart kept in his room where you can still see it. Start with a few chores. Once automatic, add one or two more. Try rotating chores. Some things need to be taught, such as making their bed or washing dishes. Don't expect your child to be an expert overnight. Praise them for their **bit-by-bit** progress; occasionally adding suggestions for improvement. If you don't expect perfection, your child won't get turned off. Over time he will get better. And... don't expect them to say, "Hey mom and dad, gee thanks for showing me how to take on more responsibility." Remember they are children, not adults.

WORDS OF CAUTION

Many children grow up believing they are entitled and do not have to give back. If your child refuses to do something that is reasonable, you might tell her "I don't *feel* like making dinner or driving you to dance class. However, everyone has responsibilities and that means it needs to be done." If she continues to resist, you might ask how she would feel if you were not responsible about bringing her to dance class. It is possible you might even have to neglect that responsibility - without anger and with an attitude of 'this is reality.' A little tough-love reality is an appropriate lesson and goes a long way.

It is all too easy to fall into the 'I can do it better and faster' trap. You will be doing your child a greater service by letting them learn a variety of household tasks; an important preparation for adulthood.

INTRINSIC REWARDS

Some parents are used to giving rewards such as a trip to the toy store. Since children get toys and gifts for so many things, consider making the reward intrinsic such as praising, 'what a terrific job you did.' There are lots of ways to show appreciation and approval without a tangible gift. What about a movie night at the end of the week, baking cookies together, riding bikes or playing a game? Otherwise, you are teaching them that they get paid, in some form, for everything they do. Do parents get paid for grocery shopping or doing household repairs? It's part of contributing to the family's functioning. If your child wants to earn some money (beyond their allowance, which is not based on doing chores) then you might offer an opportunity to do an unusual or heavy-duty job for additional income. (*See my last issue on Allowances in Family Matters*)

WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

Years ago I heard Kamahl, an Australian, sing the ballad, *No Charge*. It speaks to the underlying message of this newsletter. I was quite moved and wanted to share it with you.

"Our little boy came up to his Mama this evening while she was fixing the supper. He handed her a piece of paper he'd been writing on. And after wiping her hands on her apron, she read it. This is what it said,

For mowing the lawn	\$5.00	
For making my own bed this week	\$1.00	
For going to the store	\$.50	
Playing with little brother while you went shopping	\$.25	
Taking out the trash	\$1.00	
Getting a good report card	\$5.00	
For raking the leaves	\$2.00	Total owed \$14.75

Well his Mom looked at him standing there expectantly. I could see the memories flashing through her mind. She picked up the pen and turned the paper over. This is what she wrote:

For the nine months I carried you rolling inside	No charge
For the nights I sat up with you, doctored you and prayed for you	No charge
For the time and the tears that you caused through the years	No charge
When you all it all up, the full cost of my love is	No charge
For the nights filled with dread and all the worries ahead	No charge
For advice and the knowledge and the cost of your college	No charge
For the toys, food and clothes and for even for wiping your nose	No charge
When you add it all up the full cost of my love is	No charge

Well, when he finished reading it, he had great big tears in his eyes. He looked up at her standing there and said, "Mom, I sure do love you." And he took the pen and in great big letters he wrote, "Paid in full." Lord knows when you add it all up, the cost of real love is no charge."



Roberta Rachel Omin, LCSW, has her psychotherapy and counseling practice in Ossining, NY. She can be reached at (914) 941-8179 or goodomin@optonline.net Roberta is a holistic therapist, trained in EMDR and couples counseling. With more than twenty-five years of experience, Roberta brings sensitivity, reality and know-how to helping children, adolescents, parents and families achieve healthier more enjoyable relationships. She is currently enrolled in an Internal Family Systems program.