

TEACHING YOUR CHILD RESPONSIBILITY

Parents often wonder how much responsibility should be given to a child? While many tasks are beyond a child's capabilities, most of us do not see the tremendous potential we have as parents to TEACH children responsibility very effectively.

Every household should expect children to participate in tasks that need to be done...and we don't mean preschoolers setting the dining room table with your good china, or a five year old chopping wood. Children almost always over-estimate what they can do, so it is up to the parent to thoughtfully and carefully manage what a child is expected to do around the house. Keep in mind, when children take on a job, they have a totally different time sense than most adults. In addition, they are hardly what you would call skilled workers. We often have to come along and do some coaching, teaching them the right way to do a certain task. Sometimes children's jobs seem like more effort than it is worth. But while child labor is not a great benefit to you, it is always a great benefit for the child.

Every child who is held accountable for some consistent responsibilities around the house gains from the experience. The child who has jobs to do feels more a part of the family. He feels important, even competent and, yes, bigger. Responsibilities help a child gain independence and self-reliance - learning to do a job and take credit for it. This trait will help the child in school and in all of life's endeavors.

But how does a parent get a child to maintain his first enthusiasm for routine jobs that need to be done? Rarely does monetary payment for these jobs make a difference. But there are some things to try that might help:

- ☺ Always give encouragement, not criticism. (Tell what you liked about what they did.)
- ☺ Never, never nag. Remind once and follow through with a natural consequence such as - no chore, no store.
- ☺ No lectures, no threats. Simply carry out expected family fun times with children who have completed their jobs.
- ☺ Don't make it a major crime if a chore is not done, but don't excuse it and cover up for it either. Children don't thrive with wishy-washy parents, but they also don't do well with heartless, demanding parents.
- ☺ Find peaceful happy times to talk lots with each other about the roles everyone plays in the household. Help your child see how important HIS role is to you.
- ☺ Routines and a consistent schedule helps - certain predictable times to do jobs works best. Agree upon the chores to be done and post a written chart for daily check-ups.

Now a word about the watchful eyes of your child! You can count on your child learning responsibility if he sees you taking responsibility seriously - things such as being on time, carrying through with a promise, keeping a tidy living area, and watching you regularly gain satisfaction from a job well done. The example you provide in the home can do wonders in teaching this valuable life trait.

Lastly, think carefully about your part in supporting your child's growth in being responsible. Be warned that "over-parenting" is unhealthy and undermines a child's growth toward maturity. Avoid rescuing a child from every difficulty or problem. Don't cover up or do for the child what he is perfectly capable of doing for himself. You can teach a child to be responsible and capable.

"Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching."

Proverbs 1:8 NIV

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