

I'm Your Parent -Not your Servant-"The Importance of Teaching Respect and Responsibility"

"You have two hands!" Can you believe it? I actually heard an eight year old say this to his mother when she asked him to put his dishes in the sink after lunch. Fortunately, his mother did not let him get by with this disrespect and laziness. She knew her role was to be his parent and not his servant.

It is important for parents to see teaching respect and responsibility as a "gift" to their children. Teaching them to assume responsibility is as much of a gift as teaching them to read. This work ethic will follow them the rest of their lives. Viewing this as a gift to our children helps us to put this teaching into practice.

Too often chores have been thought of wrongly. Parents find themselves screaming about them. They are given as a part of punishment instead of a way of life. I've never heard of anybody being told to go and comb their hair or brush their teeth for punishment. Chores need to be part of a daily routine. They need not be gender specific either, boys can do dishes and laundry and girls can take out the trash.

It is important for chores to be age appropriate. I've seen parents error on all sides of this. Sometimes they are too protective and expect nothing from their children and in other instances they give too much responsibility.

I was impressed a few months ago when I saw my five year old nephew helping with the trash. He does this weekly with his dad. His job is to bring the large trash can on wheels back to the house empty. This is important since it is shared time, done routinely, and creates a work ethic. He also has a small role in wood gathering for the fireplace. Nightly, he puts a cup of food in his dog's dish too.

In reality it may sometimes be easier for my brother-in-law to do these chores alone, but he values time with his son and understands the gift of teaching a work ethic. Doing chores together also helps children to learn the proper way of doing things. They learn a lot by being involved and modeling behavior. Sharing chores also helps them to realize that chores are everyone's responsibility and not something nasty cast upon them. If the whole family participates at chore time everyone, including the children, feels respected.

We must be careful when planning chores to be respectful of our children. It is good to have a routine. When possible it is also nice to give them a time frame for chores rather than having them shut off the television just ten minutes before their favorite show ends.

Respect begets respect!

It is important to not put off chore time. Children can not be expected to clean rooms that resemble some of the cluttered filthy homes shown on television. It is important for tasks to be broken into small tasks. Sometimes we should tell them to bring all their dirty clothes to the laundry. At other times we may ask them to pick up papers. This is especially important for younger children and those with any form of disability which makes organizing difficult.

Some adults and some children have limited abilities to break chores into manageable parts. It is like the old joke of... "How do you eat an elephant?" Answer... "One bite at a time." Some think that they can not eat the elephant because he is too big. It never crosses their minds that it can be cut into small pieces.

Teachers and parents should be on the look out for children with messy desks or the inability to do simple puzzles. These may be symptoms of much more than a messy desk. A disability may be lurking or some training may be needed. Patience is required. Some tasks come easier for some than for others.

I encourage you to use this summer as a time of teaching. They will never learn unless someone shows them. How much family heritage have we let our kids miss? Do they know how to iron a shirt? Can they read a recipe or sew on a button? Can they change a tire or patch dry wall? Have they ever grown a tomato? It is time to put away the virtual toys for a bit and to experience the gift of real life and responsibility.