

5-26-09 COUNSELOR CORNER ARTICLE: Chores

Miyagi: First, wash all car. Then wax. Wax on...

Daniel: Hey, why do I have to...?

Miyagi: Ah ah! Remember deal! No questions!

Daniel: Yeah, but...

Miyagi: Hai!

[makes circular gestures with each hand]

Miyagi: Wax on, right hand. Wax off, left hand. Wax on, wax off. Breathe in through nose, out the mouth. Wax on, wax off. Don't forget to breathe, very important.

[walks away, still making circular motions with hands]

Miyagi: Wax on, wax off. Wax on, wax off.”

Karate Kid Part 1

Do you remember in the movie, Karate Kid Part 1, when Mr. Miyagi promised to teach Daniel LaRusso karate? Daniel was the new kid from New Jersey and was being bullied by a group of boys in his new school. Instead of teaching karate, Mr. Miyagi assigned chores such as waxing the car and painting the fence. Daniel was more than a little agitated when he argued that Mr. Miyagi was more interested in his ‘slave labor’ than he was teaching him karate! What Daniel didn’t realize was that he was developing muscles and training his mind by the repetition of the motions that were needed for successful karate moves. (I wish I could have been as creative and patient as Mr. Miyagi when my own children complained that I was violating child labor laws when they were expected to help around the house!)

Many families do not require children to maintain a steady chore schedule during the school year other than personal maintenance, school homework, participation in athletic events, and music/art/dance lessons, etc. However, summer months are ideal for building family unity and developing responsibility in even our younger children through chores

Excuses parents give for not giving kids chores:

Parents give many excuses for not including their children in the tedious and oh-so-often drudgery of daily living. Some excuses I have heard include: “It’s easier to do it myself than to keep after my child to do the chore or go in afterwards and get it done right!”

“Kids need to be kids. They should not have to spend time doing things that moms should be doing for them (laundry, meal planning and preparation, cleaning, etc.)”

“I had to do chores when I was growing up and I hated doing them! I don’t want my children to remember me as the chore police!”

Consider the benefits of “staying-the-course” in the chore battle with your kids.

I know how hard it is to involve kids in assisting with the everyday details of maintaining a household. However, every time you give your child a chore to do, teach him/her how to do the chore according to your expectations, and hold him/her accountable to get the chore done in a reasonable amount of time, you are giving your child a gift! When your kids argue and complain, stay focused on the long term goals of parenting....to raise children who will grow to be successful, happy, and well balanced adults: Happily married or involved in a secure relationship with families who love and support each other, healthy, gainfully employed, and responsible citizens of their communities. The parallels between school and family chores are numerous. Skills such as persistence, perseverance, doing things that may be hard and perceived as ‘not fun’ are important and best effort is expected and necessary for success in academics and in life.

Suggestions from the experts on how involve kids in chores:

- ** Make sure the chores you assign are age appropriate and the child has training and the proper tools needed to complete the chore are available.
- ** Check out the many web sites that offer free downloadable chore charts. The resources listed below offer suggestion or links that may be helpful. Find one that works for you and your family and post it in a convenient place for all to see.
- ** Who said that chores had to be something to be dreaded? Turn on music or make chores a game: Who can get done first. beat the clock, or lets see how many things we can pick up that are red. One creative mom included fun chores like 'give mom a hug and a kiss' and 'take a 5 minute snack break'.
- ** Parents and other adults in the household must be unified in chore assignments. Kids notice when one parent assigns a chore and the other parent thinks chore completion is 'no big deal', Parents should agree privately about the expectations and ground rules to consistently enforce compliance to chore arrangements.
- ** Discover what your child's style is. Does your child work better alone or with others? Is he a reader or a listener? Does she need step-by-step instructions or does he like to discover the best way to do something on his own? If your child likes to read, chances are she'll respond better to a written list of chores and instructions.
- ** Stress that chores are a part of being in a family and rewards are not to be expected. "While giving an allowance can be tied to be a contributing member of a household (and with that the fulfillment of certain tasks and chores), kids should not be rewarded for doing chores that are part of family business. Kids don't need and don't deserve a quarter, for example, every time they take out the trash. After all, what lesson does that teach them?" (McClure) One family had a list of extra chores that could be done to earn money and another family had a 'mom's chore choice' and a 'dad's chore choice'. Mom's list included things like picking and arranging flowers for the table or making brownies for the family. Dad's list included things like sorting out the gadgets and assorted nails, nuts and bolts that accumulated in the garage, working in the garden and replacing the light bulbs.

If chores are met with resistance, here are a few things to keep in mind that can help you when you're tempted to retreat and give up the chore battle:

- ** It's inevitable that a child will attempt to barter or negotiate why a chore doesn't need to be done--either at all or at the designated time. Parents often err by giving in once or twice only to find their authority is then undermined. Refrain from engaging in an argument or negotiation about the chore. Many kids will spend more time trying to argue about it than it would have to have simply done the chore; a fact you can always remind them of. The key is to not become mad or upset; simply ignore or tune-out grumbles and don't give in. (McClure)
- ** Have you given instructions in a way that gives your child a clear explanation of what is expected? If 'no', consider retraining, coaching, breaking the task into smaller steps and/or taking a picture of what the finished product should look like.
- ** Parents should try to avoid falling into the trap of repeatedly reminding and/or nagging their children to complete their chores. Such reminding puts the responsibility for completion of the chores on the parents. Instead, parents should make sure that their children are given the sole responsibility for the completion of their chores. If a child forgets or refuses to do a chore, parents should say nothing and simply apply the consequences. (Darling, 1995)
- ** Parents should not do their children's work for them. If parents get frustrated and give in and do their children's chores, children learn a number of things and not the lesson that you had intended! First of all, children learn that their parents don't mean what they say and will not follow through. Secondly, children learn that if they hold out long enough someone will do their chores for them. Parents should simply apply consequences until their children comply. (Darling, 1995)

The karate kid learned so much more than karate...he learned the value of discipline, inner strength, self-confidence, work ethic and always doing your best even when it's hard. As a result he learned, self-discipline, self-respect, and the value a relationship built on mutual respect, admiration and trust. And just think....it all started with a summer and a list of chores!

Thank you for taking the time to read my article. I hope you have found it to be helpful. Have a wonderful week and a fantastic summer. Mary Warren

Resources:

*<http://childcare.about.com/od/generaladvice/a/kidchores.htm> Kid Chores Teach Responsibility, Family Involvement: Don't Let Chore List Become Dispute By Robin McClure, About.com

*www.parenting-ed.org

*<http://parenting.ivillage.com/mom/organization/0,,4283,00.html> "Household Chores: The Do's and Don'ts of Involving Your Child" by Tammy Darling

*www.successfulfamilychores.com/

*www.tipztime.com/chorecharts/freechorecharts.html