

Requiring Children To Do Chores

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 22 August, 2003 - 23:00

Posted by **David Deutsch** on the [TCS List](#) on Fri, 1 Aug, 1997, at 03:46:39 +0100



A poster wrote, in defence of requiring children to do chores:

I'm not willing to go to work everyday to earn the money needed to pay for the computers, toys, food, etc that everyone else buys if I must live in a messy house because the person who made the mess didn't feel like cleaning it up today and decided to wait until next week!

This unwillingness of yours, stressed by your outraged exclamation mark, means that you cannot be happy unless someone else does certain chores that you want done. On the other hand, 'requiring' others to do these chores (which is a euphemism for hurting them when they refuse or fail to perform to your satisfaction) makes you unhappy too. It follows that you are destined to be unhappy.

Or does it?

You see, there's another way of looking at all this, and that's what TCS is all about. But from the way you are analysing this problem, I guess that your main obstacle in understanding what TCS is all about will be a moral one: you believe that a parent's financial support and other services for his children morally obliges the children to provide certain services in return. But there is no justification for that belief. It is just a rationalisation of the traditional status quo between parent and child. The truth is that there is a moral asymmetry between parent and child: in the event of an intractable dispute between them, the parent chose to place the child in the situation that caused the dispute; the child did not choose to place the parent there.

Hence the fact that you "not willing to go to work every day" etc., without receiving services from your children in return is (morally) your problem, and not theirs. The fact that your children would be unhappy without those services, and are also unhappy to provide you with the services you demand, is also (morally) *your* problem. You chose the latter problem for yourself; you were saddled with the former by your own parents.



Posted by **David Deutsch** on the [TCS List](#) on Fri, 1 Aug, 1997, at 15:19:57 +0100

The poster then wrote:

No one ever wants to do chores! You must learn to be responsible and do your part. Children eat and children make messes. For me it follows

It is not up to you to choose what follows! In fact, it does not follow.

that children have a part in helping with providing food and cleaning up messes. I'm not saying that a child will not be responsible and do their part without being coerced, but the child needs to learn that the parent is in charge and if the parent says that the corn needs to be planted today then they help with the planting today.

It's interesting that to make your point, you choose subsistence agriculture as a metaphor: a primitive way of life that is nasty, brutish and short, and where there are no trade-offs, no options and no scope for creativity because every decision is a matter of life and death.

Whether or not things ever were like that, your vision of your own life today as fundamentally comparable with that situation is a statement about your own psychology, not about the external situation you are in. In taking it for granted that life, or a significant part of it, consists of things that “no one ever wants to do”, and that children in particular must therefore either force themselves to do such things or be forced to, you believe that you are transmitting an unpleasant fact about the world to the next generation. But in reality, you are merely passing on a set of hangups that have little or no basis in external fact.

[to post comments](#)

Comments

But don't children have any obligations?

Submitted by Henry Sturman on 24 August, 2003 - 10:55

Yes, that is one thing I like about TCS, the fact that it doesn't accept the dogma of purist libertarians, such as Frances Kendall, that any trade between children and parents is OK, because it's voluntary. It may be legally OK, but it's not always morally OK. I think the common reduction ad absurdum of TCS is to point out that on those grounds it would be OK for parents to demand sexual services from their children in exchange for food (amazingly some hard-core libertarians agree with this). David is right to point out there is an asymmetry in the relationship. Parents chose to have children, and so have a moral responsibility to take care of them.

However, does this mean there is no limit to how much a parent should provide or that a child has absolutely no obligation to do anything whatsoever which it might not feel like? I can't see how that follows. The first part is certainly impossible. A parent can't be expected to provide anything a child may want. Nobody has unlimited resources. This leaves open the question of why it wouldn't be OK to offer a trade for something extra. We may agree that a parent who provides his child with food, housing, a bicycle, toys, etc. has done enough that can be expected of him. Let's say we agree he does not have the obligation to buy a new extra luxury sports bicycle for his child, just because the child would like to have it, even though he does already have a standard bicycle. Surely, the parent does have the right to buy some things for himself, and doesn't have to provide every possible luxury to his child. So, we can probably agree said situation is acceptable. Now, what if the parent offers the child to buy him the luxury bicycle in exchange for the child doing some chore? Would that be wrong on the grounds that it's on par with requesting sexual services in exchange for food? I don't see why. We've already agreed that the parent has provided enough in terms of what can be reasonably expected. So this is simply an additional option which can only make the child better off compared to his original position. So it would make no sense to forbid the trade.

Of course this does create the problem of where a trade becomes reasonable (such as in the case of offering a luxury bicycle in exchange for chores) and where it becomes coercive (such as in the case of offering food in

exchange for sexual services). There is no totally objective criterion where the line lies. We should just try to be reasonable somehow. But I do think I've made it clear that things aren't always as simple as TCS says they are.

Another point is that even aside from the trade issue, I don't see how it follows from the fact that parents choose to have children that the children don't have any obligation whatsoever in the household. Surely, there must be some reciprocity. Yes, parents have to provide, but that doesn't mean children should be able to take all that entirely for granted. Common decency dictates that if children, or anybody else for that matter, live in a house together with other people, they should clean up their mess. If children make a mess of the living room, the parent's request for them to clean it is a reasonable request. One would expect the same of guests or adults who are living together. Of course, parents should not request their children to clean their own room, for that doesn't effect the common living conditions.

But, I think it goes even further than this. Not only should children be expected to clean up their mess in the living room, but also it is reasonable to request that children take some part in their own provisions. Where on earth does this idea come from that children have some kind of inherent right to be totally spoiled with all their needs fulfilled without them doing anything for it until some unspecified age? Surely the obligation of parents to take care of their children stems from the fact that young children cannot take care of themselves. A baby can't do anything in it's own support, so it's natural that the parents will provide everything. But a child of, say, 10 years old is just as capable of doing the dishes as an adult. So why should the request of a parent that a child helps with the dishes, or does some other house chores, in exchange for providing him with food etc. be unreasonable? And if a child of 10 has a right to full and free hotel services, then why doesn't an adult of 20 have the same right from his parents? Again, I'm not saying that a parent has the right to request any services from his child. There must be some balance of reasonableness. But to go to the other extreme, that the child has an inherent right to anything without in any way participating in the fulfillment of his own needs, even when he's just as capable as an adult to help out, I can't see where that's coming from.

[to post comments](#)

obligations

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 24 August, 2003 - 11:40

obligations only come from choices. so the specific obligations a child has is dictated only by actual things that child has done. there are no general-case obligations for all children, because there is no obligation-creating choice all children have made. the reason there are for parents, is we know a choice that all parents did make. children do get obligations from their life, and there are even ones that are common to many children.

or more mundanely: *if* a parent is good to his child, the child will want to help out with stuff (though not necessarily exactly the things the parent wants the child to do)

-- Elliot Temple

[to post comments](#)

parent-child relationship is not a trade transaction

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 24 August, 2003 - 18:50

To pretend that that is all there is to it is to miss the richness and complexity of human relationships.

It is the intangibles in the relationship that form the basis for interaction, imo. In my understanding, coming from a TCS worldview includes a parent being acutely interested in helping their children to learn- about their selves, about the world around them, about relationships, how to make their way in the world. This happens through helping children to do what they are interested in.

Extracting a promise to do X in exchange for getting a child the Y that they are intensely interested in takes time and energy away from the things that they are interested in learning about, here and now.

That chore will get done, maybe even by the child when they are ready to take a break from doing whatever they are doing with Y. Maybe parents need to find fascinating things to be involved with, as well, so that they are not so caught up in the logistics of how the chore is going to get done.

[to post comments](#)

Wow! "It's interest..."

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 22 September, 2003 - 04:51

Wow! "It's interesting that to make your point, you choose subsistence agriculture as a metaphor: a primitive way of life that is nasty, brutish and short, and where there are no trade-offs, no options and no scope for creativity because every decision is a matter of life and death." That's quite a bigoted statement for society that espouses such tolerance. Not to mention wholly inaccurate. Where does your food come from? Do you grow your own? If so do your children help? If not isn't it highly hypocritical to exploit these poor down-trodden primitives by grocery shopping? Just a thought

[to post comments](#)

The reference was to subsistence agriculture...

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 29 September, 2003 - 12:54

Your groceries weren't produced by subsistence farmers.

[to post comments](#)

Oh, right, it's not subsistence ...

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 16 October, 2003 - 19:45

I'm not the original poster, but can't help mentioning that most of the food in the grocery store is grown by workers at barely subsistence wages & nothing else (like health care for instance),

while some multinational corporation makes yet another obscene profit.

So there are probably a number of conversations going on in the world that begin with "Today is when we plant the corn ..." And just because they are between boss & worker doesn't mean that they don't carry all the same implications of parent/child discussed here.

[to post comments](#)

I was never required to do ch...

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 7 November, 2003 - 22:59

I was never required to do chores as a child (not because my mother practiced "TCS" but because she was too mentally ill to parent at all) and I had a HUGE learning curve when I got out on my own. I want my kids to enter their adult lives able to cook a meal, wash their clothes without ruining them and keep their homes clean.

[to post comments](#)

Do they agree with you?

Submitted by JDR on 8 November, 2003 - 20:23

Is that what your children want for themselves, too?

We can't solve the problems of our own childhood by "making" (against their will) our children (who have been raised in a vastly different environment for the most part) do something that we think we might have liked ourselves in our own childhood.

This includes dance lessons, music lessons, being made ot attend church or not attend church, etc. etc. as well as chores.

Our children are separate people. What **they** want for themselves is what is important and our job as parents is to help them to get/do what they want in ways that make sense to both children and parents.

[to post comments](#)

They just want to do what we do!

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 13 November, 2003 - 01:31

Why is it so hard to get children to brush their teeth, go to bed, or pick up the floor? Our children (we have 3) seem to want to do all the mundane chores around the house with us. Maybe it is because that is all they see us do. "Things" we are given on the children's behalf just get trashed and they want to play with all of our stuff, which they USUALLY treat better.

[to post comments](#)

A lot has been said about the

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 30 April, 2004 - 22:50

A lot has been said about the obligation incurred by a parent in the act of creating a child, but as an above reader alluded to, that obligation entails more than just providing for their essentials or even their happiness. As a parent, part of the obligation is a responsibility to give your child the tools necessary to cope with life. Unless you're in the upper 1% of the socioeconomic strata and your child will have hired help all the days of his/her life, he or she will be terribly handicapped if they reach adulthood without some training in cooking, washing dishes, doing laundry, etc. If you're wanting to avoid coercion, there may be some non-coercive ways to teach a child these skills, but they must be taught at some point. The fact that the child doesn't want to do chores is no excuse for you, the more experienced parent, to do something to your kid which will ultimately be harmful. If a three-year-old tried to put his hand into a flame because he wanted to touch the pretty colors, you would be entirely within your right to pull him away, even if he cries and gets mad at you for it, and in fact you would be a very neglectful parent if you didn't.

Another poster raised the issue that everybody comes into existence through no choice of their own, but that as people grow up and begin to achieve a greater understanding of the world and a greater capability to affect it, responsibilities arise. My mother, at 50, could not move back in with her nearly crippled parents and demand that they provide for her and never ask her to lift a finger in keeping the house. As your ability to care for yourself grows, your responsibility to care for yourself grows as well. Asking a nine-year-old to wash the dishes after dinner is no more unreasonable than asking his parent to do so - both are capable of the task, both ate the dinner that produced the dirty dishes, and both would have to live with the consequences of a smelly, unhealthy sink if they didn't get washed. My point here is that we DO have responsibilities to our kids for bringing them into the world, but part of that responsibility is teaching them that they, too have responsibilities.

[to post comments](#)

Moral Asymmetry (was originally about chores)

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 20 June, 2004 - 03:20

*I'm fascinated by the concept *The truth is that there is a moral asymmetry between parent and child: in the event of an intractable dispute between them, the parent chose to place the child in the situation that caused the dispute; the child did not choose to place the parent there.**

I have frequent experiences with a child who, when asked to give input into a family decision, insists that the only thing which would be acceptable is something that is known *a priori* to be a non-starter for one of his parents. (E.g. when faced with a restaurant choice this child might categorically reject those which serve food acceptable to everyone, pushing instead for one that serves his favorite food but at which one parent can't eat anything because of food allergies.)

Trying to reach a common preference in this situation is an exercise in frustration. Becoming an adult doesn't allow someone to choose their food allergies...how are the parents putting the child in this intractable dispute, and why aren't the child's choices at least partly responsible? I'm just not seeing it.

[to post comments](#)

Learning to be adults

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 6 July, 2004 - 01:42

Kids don't wake up one day and know how to take care of themselves. Like every other skill they will need for their ultimate independence and freedom, learning to feed and care for themselves and any children they will have some day is critical. My husband had to learn even the most basic cooking and housekeeping skills when he left home, and he is very much hampered in his abilities to organize and direct his own life because he never had to lift a finger around the house.

When I remind my children to do their jobs, I used to get some whining. I pointed out two key things a couple of times and the grumbling and stalling diminished tremendously: 1)they are members of the household and we will consult them about household issues that affect their wellbeing or have an impact on their lives as they become increasingly able BUT they need to contribute to said household as they grow older and are increasingly able or we will "treat them like babies" and no longer ask and 2)they will one day have their own homes and will WANT to be independently able to run their own lives and need to learn to do so! They are now experimenting with their "power" to do tasks as they see fit, arranging their rooms as they see fit and finding better ways to put away dishes and groceries.

I think they now have some sense of membership and ownership of the place as a result of "making" them do chores. Both my boys want to grow up and be independent of us one day and being blunt about that fact helped them understand our concerns. It does help to make sure such membership has it's priveleges as a motivation for sticking to the responsibilities it also carries. Perhaps the original poster was moving toward that in his or her own way, but lacked the conceptual language to communicate it beyond 1950's concepts of "I make the money so I'm the boss and you must serve me and keep the house uber clean damnit"? It took me some time to get from there to here myself.

[to post comments](#)

Yes, let's keep mothers at ho

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 25 October, 2004 - 14:44

Yes, let's keep mothers at home instead, taking care of the children and all the household chores without a break.

[to post comments](#)

Two Excuses

Submitted by Alan Forrester on 16 November, 2004 - 20:58

A reader wrote:

'1)they are members of the household and we will consult them about household issues that affect their wellbeing or have an impact on their lives as they become increasingly able BUT they need to contribute to said household as they grow older and are increasingly able or we will "treat them like babies" and no longer ask'

I can't help but think this 'need to contribute' thing is a bit of a smokescreen. Sometimes it will be convenient for a child to do a particular task like take out the garbage or do the dishes and sometimes it won't. Why not just say 'Could someone take out the rubbish because I'm busy doing this and I don't want it stinking up the house'? It seems strange to me that anyone should make such a big deal about it.

'and 2)they will one day have their own homes and will WANT to be independently able to run their own lives and need to learn to do so!'

Speaking of making a big deal out of things...

I don't see how any of the things traditionally designated as chores can possibly be deemed to be difficult. Washing machines come with instruction manuals, as do dishwashers. Washing the dishes just involves putting hot water into a basin along with washing up liquid and then scrubbing stuff. Some housework is time consuming but none of it is that difficult. BTW, part of becoming independent is learning to make your own judgements about when the dishes need washed. How exactly children can learn this by their parents bugging them about doing chores is beyond me.

to post comments

Several responses here, and I

Submitted by Relsqui (not verified) on 4 December, 2004 - 07:51

Several responses here, and I'll keep track of what I'm answering as best I can.

Henry Sturman wrote: "Parents chose to have children, and so have a moral responsibility to take care of them."

I can't help but be reminded of my boyfriend by that remark. He and I both used to get in arguments with our mothers when they tried to lord over us that they gave us life. This to me is the fundamental basis of the "moral asymmetry": they chose to have us, and we had no part in that decision. We might be grateful (if we're happy with having life), we might not, but in any other circumstances it would be unreasonable to expect anyone to assume the worldly obligations which are necessarily thrust upon them by birth. It's a miracle so many of us grow up into useful adults. ;)

"So why should the request of a parent that a child helps with the dishes, or does some other house chores, in exchange for providing him with food etc. be unreasonable?"

The answer to this is the same as the answer to your earlier one about when a trade becomes unreasonable: it's when you ask things of them in exchange for food. Or shelter. Or clothing. Or love. Those are the things which you took it upon yourself to provide when you chose to have children, and you cannot call yourself a good parent if you even suggest that you could take them away. There are other ways, as your hypothetical situation about trading a bike for chores made me think of.

Giving a reward for doing chores (or whatever) is useful for one reason. It demonstrates to the child something that will be true for the rest of his life: that if he wants something he has to work for it. It certainly does not teach him to clean up his own mess! A better way to teach that same life lesson might be to explain to the child that you can't really afford to get him the luxury bike when he's already got a perfectly good one, but perhaps he can come up with some clever way of earning the money for it. That way, the kid's at least being creative, and if he's dedicated enough he gets not only the bike but the much greater reward of having earned it.

Several people wrote of children's need to know how to do chores, for example:

"I want my kids to enter their adult lives able to cook a meal, wash their clothes without ruining them and keep their homes clean."

So teach them. (Duh.)

You don't have to force them. You could ask them to help you, perhaps on a day when they're feeling a particular need to be treated like a grown-up. If they're scientifically inclined, talk about the chemistry involved--it's interesting stuff! If they're fashion-conscious (in the way that only little kids can be), they might be particularly interested in different fabrics and how some need to be washed differently from others.

"Asking a nine-year-old to wash the dishes after dinner is no more unreasonable than asking his parent to do so ..."

Again, asking a nine-year-old to do the dishes isn't unreasonable, but forcing him to do it is. As would be forcing the parent! The difference is that the parent understands and accepts the responsibility to wash dishes, whereas the child might not. The right thing to do, then, is not to take advantage of your position of power by making him do it, but give him the same respect you would his mother or father: Convince him. Similar to the above (as well as to what someone else wrote), he may puff up his chest with pride at the suggestion that he's an important member of the household, and as such accept the obligations that come with it. It's a fine line between handing him such a role and having him take it on himself, but an important one.

to post comments

Question

Submitted by helenahar (not verified) on 13 December, 2004 - 05:30

What if an older child does not accept continued guidance and counseling that it would be best to pick up after him/herself? Is it then "okay" to allow him or her suffer the natural consequences of a filthy household (bad smells, bugs, rodents, lost items, embarrassment when visitors come, needed items dirty, etc.)? Or would a parent be obligated to clean up after the child?

[Here's \(http://www.cbc.ca/story/world/national/2004/12/10/parents-strike041210.html\)](http://www.cbc.ca/story/world/national/2004/12/10/parents-strike041210.html) a recent news story about parents who went on strike.

to post comments

chores

Submitted by violet_yoshi (not verified) on 5 June, 2005 - 14:12

Ok first of all let me say, the parents on strike thing. Talk about immature! "Hey I know how we'll teach our kids a lesson. Let's humiliate them in front of the whole neighborhood by going on strike! Oh sure they'll have mental issues afterwards, but we have rights!"

First of all, children weren't asked to be brought into this world. Now I'm not saying this means they shouldn't be grateful they're here. What I mean is that the parents took the responsibility to have the child, it should be no

surprise to them what they were getting themselves into.

I think it's reasonable to ask kids to pick up after themselves. It's unreasonable to ask your kids to do a day's worth of chores, unless they get compensation. You wouldn't hire someone to be your maid, and not pay them for their work, would you?

I also think though, that for some kids, the idea of having a list of chores lined up is overwhelming. As in the fear that they'll have their tv/video games/whatever privileges taken away, could make them feel like you're dominating over them.

This is where you should involve communication with your kids. Like say "Alright we'll take this one step at a time" Not expect them, just to start doing chores in a day.

I think threatening kids with loss of privileges, and grounding, is wrong. It's like are you their parent, or their furher? You have to respect that your child has the right to do what they want, as human beings. There are ways to teach them consequences, like the ever-popular guilt trip. Which while it might be too much for some kids, other kids might remember it and to avoid that feeling do what they should.

I think what I'm trying to say here though, is you should know when your child is overwhelmed. You can't push them past their limits. I have an issue with feeling guilty for not doing anything for a day, because that's how I was treated about school. You see if you raise your child to feel personal blame, for not working like a robot. They'll most likely grow up to have OCD, or be over-perfectionists. It has to be a balance. Instilling fear as a consequence for not doing chores, there has to be a better way then that.

to post comments

More on Chores

Submitted by Marie Keith-Winters (not verified) on 19 July, 2005 - 05:01

I require my son to do chores. My parents did not require my brother to do chores, or to do anything else for that matter. They allowed him to do whatever he wished. The result, as I see it, is that he has no desire, as an adult, to do anything that is not immediately gratifying and enjoyable. He doesn't wash his clothes until he runs out of clean clothes. As a result, he never has any appropriate clothes in wearable condition when a company wants to interview him for a job he would like. He gets contacted by companies who have been impressed by the freeware and shareware he has authored, and would like to hire him. He says he would like to have a job in the field, but he still doesn't have a job. He does, on the other hand, continue to write brilliant computer software and doesn't earn a dime. Just check out the latest releases of Linux and you will find my brother's name credited for parts of it. Everything my brother has was purchased for him by my parents, and they are still supporting him as a result of their failure to impart to him the idea that sometimes people do things not for their immediate enjoyment, but because eventually they will wish they had done these things.

On the other hand, my son does chores every day. He also understands very well that if he wants more than the basics, it is up to him to figure out ways to earn the extra things. He also understands that working 40+ hours a week, his parents don't have time to do all of the chores around the house ourselves and therefore need his help. But unlike my brother, my son also understands that it is well within his reach to earn or otherwise get things that are beyond the basics. It is up to him to determine how hard he wants to work to get the things he wants. These are, I think, the ultimate goals of having children do chores: teaching them life lessons about doing things for yourself, earning things you want, and being able to maintain and live in a nice, comfortable, home. Without doing chores, my brother never learned any of these lessons. It's not about "I feed you, therefore you are my slave". It is

about doing things for yourself, because one day unless you are very rich, there will be no one else to do these things for you. I am very worried about how my parents will fare if I die before my parents and younger brother. In their old age, when they are not able to take care of themselves, will my brother have ever learned to take care of himself as well as them? I think not. And, if my parents die before my brother, what will become of him? Without them working or drawing retirement income, he will not have a roof over his head. I will not support him unless he does trade some substantial amount of services in return for his room and board (assuming he is still an able-bodied adult at the time), but I really don't expect that he ever will be willing to make that trade either. I fully expect him to pick homelessness over work. And that sickens me too, to think of my family member possibly living on the street in the future. And I can trace it back to his childhood when he was never required to do any work as a child. During our childhood is when we learn the basis for the things that we do as adults.

to post comments

Re: More on Chores

Submitted by Alan Forrester on 22 July, 2005 - 13:38

Marie Keith-Winters wrote:

I require my son to do chores. My parents did not require my brother to do chores, or to do anything else for that matter. They allowed him to do whatever he wished. The result, as I see it, is that he has no desire, as an adult, to do anything that is not immediately gratifying and enjoyable. He doesn't wash his clothes until he runs out of clean clothes. As a result, he never has any appropriate clothes in wearable condition when a company wants to interview him for a job he would like. He gets contacted by companies who have been impressed by the freeware and shareware he has authored, and would like to hire him. He says he would like to have a job in the field, but he still doesn't have a job. He does, on the other hand, continue to write brilliant computer software and doesn't earn a dime. Just check out the latest releases of Linux and you will find my brother's name credited for parts of it. Everything my brother has was purchased for him by my parents, and they are still supporting him as a result of their failure to impart to him the idea that sometimes people do things not for their immediate enjoyment, but because eventually they will wish they had done these things.

There are lots of ways for your brother to have clothes available for interviews and not all of them involve him washing clothes as you want him to. For example, your brother or your parents could keep aside one good suit of clothes so that he will have it for interviews. Or he could learn to just wash one good set of clothes when a job interview comes up. Or he could take them to a laundry who would wash the clothes for him. (An important skill for a high-powered executive type I should think!) Or... So your 'moral' that he has to wash his clothes regularly is false.

On the other hand, my son does chores every day. He also understands very well that if he wants more than the basics, it is up to him to figure out ways to earn the extra things. He also understands that working 40+ hours a week, his parents don't have time to do all of the chores around the house ourselves and therefore need his help. But unlike my brother, my son also understands that it is well within his reach to earn or otherwise get things that are beyond the basics. It is up to him to determine how hard he wants to work to get the things he wants. These are, I think, the ultimate goals of having children do chores: teaching them life lessons about doing things for yourself, earning things you want, and being able to maintain and live in a nice, comfortable, home. Without doing chores, my brother never learned any of these lessons. It's not about "I feed you, therefore you are my slave". It is about doing things for yourself, because one day unless you are very rich, there will be no one else to do these things for you.

Well, of course, this is the usual excuse for making children do chores. However, I don't think it washes. I can't see any reason why you shouldn't come to common preferences about what your son does around the house. Then he will learn to deal with housework using his creativity and his best ideas rather than sticking to some set way of doing things that you have taught him.

I am very worried about how my parents will fare if I die before my parents and younger brother. In their old age, when they are not able to take care of themselves, will my brother have ever learned to take care of himself as well as them? I think not. And, if my parents die before my brother, what will become of him? Without them working or drawing retirement income, he will not have a roof over his head. I will not support him unless he does trade some substantial amount of services in return for his room and board (assuming he is still an able-bodied adult at the time), but I really don't expect that he ever will be willing to make that trade either. I fully expect him to pick homelessness over work. And that sickens me too, to think of my family member possibly living on the street in the future. And I can trace it back to his childhood when he was never required to do any work as a child. During our childhood is when we learn the basis for the things that we do as adults.

Ah, the old 'if I don't use the carrot and stick he won't do it' routine. Here's a different idea. Help him to learn to wash his clothes as and when he needs them. And remind him that his parents won't be able to support him indefinitely and if he wants to keep doing computer programming he needs money for computers, electricity and so on. So if he gets a job doing computer programming that will be a sweet deal for him, he'll get to do something he likes and he'll get money too.

[to post comments](#)

chores

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 19 January, 2006 - 03:01

My parents never required me to do chores, but sometimes if my dad really needed something done, he would give us the option, like, chipping mortar off bricks for 2 cents a brick. He never nagged us, never reminded us. We usually enjoyed it, choosing the activity on our own. When I was six, my dad was removing stumps from eleven trees from our yard. It was 1968, my dad was an ex-farmer, and he didn't call a stump-removal service. We dug deep trenches around every stump. He never told me to get out of the way. I learned to think stump removal was bliss. He showed me proper techniques and let me use every tool I could lift. He must have been watching me pretty closely. So, years later, when he was sweating buckets to dig a hole to put in a pool for us, do you think he said, "You had better stop your playing around and come help me dig this hole if you want to be allowed to swim in this pool". No he didn't. He is a man of few words. I don't guess I knew him very well and we never talked and I grew up a pretty rebellious teen, but when I saw him digging, I was thrilled. I couldn't imagine wanting to do anything more. For the same reason, my husband could hardly keep me from helping him roof the house when I was seven months pregnant. I kid you not, my dad taught me. How? Through example and silence! Now, I've been raising my own kids for 21 years. I have tried with everything in me to be my father when it comes to work, and it teaches children better than any contrived method. My children are wonderfully helpful and thoughtful and generous. I never "give them chores". There are only a few things that actually feel like work to me. Like ironing and putting fitted sheets on beds and cleaning up throw-up!

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responsibility

Submitted by Tera on 23 August, 2007 - 07:41

In other words, maybe we can more powerfully say what it is we are really trying to say here by saying something other than "...they, too have responsibilities".

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responsibility

Submitted by Tera on 23 August, 2007 - 07:49

Pardon me if I already sent this comment:

It should precede the comment about saying something other than "...they, too have responsibilities".

This is a quote that has been most helpful to me as a human being, let alone, a mother.

"Responsibility begins with the willingness to be cause in the matter of one's life. Ultimately, it is a context from which one chooses to live. Responsibility is not burden, fault, praise, blame, credit, shame or guilt. In responsibility there is no evaluation of good or bad, right or wrong. There is simply what's so, and your stand. Being responsible starts with the willingness to deal with a situation from the view of life that you are the generator of what you do, what you have, and what you are. That is not the truth. It is a place to stand. No one can make you responsible, nor can you impose responsibility on another. It is a grace you give yourself - an empowering context that leaves you with a say in the matter of life". -Werner Erhard

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"someone"

Submitted by Tera on 23 August, 2007 - 08:09

It doesn't make sense, or rather, is not an authentic request to ask "someone" to do anything around the house as there is no one named "someone" to accept the request.

At the risk of sounding very ignorant, although I resonate with your comment, "How exactly children can learn this by their parents bugging them about doing chores is beyond me", it currently IS beyond me to stay firm-minded and focused enough to get the help of my children consistently.

I am aware that some make it look so easy and to them it is easy, but it truly alludes me, currently. I say 'currently' because I am committed to transforming this area of my life.

I guess I am looking for an all-encompassing philosophy that I can look to to give me consistent focus and direction in this area of my life.

I love the whole idea of TCS. It makes sense to me. Now, how to deal with where it is that the rubber meets the road. There is a disconnect here for me and I'm committed to having a breakthrough in this area of my life, for my

happiness and well-being and that of each and every one of my children.

Thank-you for your time and attention.

to post comments

HMMMMM...

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 28 July, 2008 - 18:37

A child does have obligations to do chores around the house, as he benefits from living in the house. Hopefully, a minimum of coercion will be necessary, but some is necessary, then so be it. My children usually do not have to be told to do chores, and they are homeschooled. This is all done with an eye towards making them 100% self reliant as adults. I think Marie Keith-Winters is right on target.

to post comments

If you make children do

Submitted by [emmaagain \(not verified\)](http://www.childrenarepeople.blogspot.com) (<http://www.childrenarepeople.blogspot.com>) on 30 July, 2008 - 15:41

If you make children do chores, you never have that moment when they start helping you of their own free will - as a small child, helping to pick up jigsaw pieces, maybe, or, as an older child, offering to cook dinner or do some ironing (not that I own an iron...).

Contributing to the smooth running of a household by your own free will in your own way when you are ready and see the value in it - no forcing of chores and responsibilities can substitute for that as an experience in mutual respect and learning.

to post comments

We dealt with the chores

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 12 August, 2008 - 05:15

We dealt with the chores issue this summer. I was in school all day, dh was at work, and my mother was watching the kids. She doesn't do chores. Well, with 7 people living in a house and little money to spare, clothing and dishes pile up. I made it clear that I could only do dishes on the weekends, and only do clothes on the weekends, and didn't have the time or energy to go searching for either. After 2 days, the dishes were used up, the kids ate dinner out of cups (pasta, because noone took anything out of the freezer to defrost). The clothes were used by the weekend but noone deposited them in the laundry room, so my clothes got washed and the kids had none. By day 3, the dishes were done at night because the kids figured out that to eat, you need clean dishes. The clothes were done (the 7 year old agreed happily to do the 4 yr. olds once she brought them to him) because they realized that they couldn't go outside to play naked.

This was not planned, nor was it on purpose, I just didn't have the time and dh, well his work has him out of town most weeks. But now they get it. They started taking the trash out daily because the smell bugged them. And they

keep their toys out of the living room because on weekends I sweep, and don't usually sort through the mess. When I sweep, they watch and grab any toys before I sweep them into the dust pan.

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What?

Submitted by Bastien (not verified) on 2 December, 2009 - 19:44

Kid's need to be able to do chores. I can't believe anyone here would want there kid to do it out of "Free Will". Really? I child isn't going to want to clean up the house.

They don't have sympathy for parents when it comes to cleaning. They didn't chose to live there and MANY children aren't bothered by the house or their room's being dirty.

My roommate can't even wash his own clothes, didn't know how to ring out a MOP! Nor does he even realize that if the vacuum get's clogged by you, you need to fix it. He never had to do chores.

Kid's do chores because they live in a house they don't pay for, eat food they didn't provide, and are becoming adult's. They need to learn that cleaning is necessary, and keeping up the house is as well. If you are dumb enough to allow your kid to choose to clean up his room, that's your business, but it's dumb.

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Anyone who claims that a

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 17 March, 2011 - 14:03

Anyone who claims that a child shouldn't do chores is completely ignorant. You are teaching your child that laziness is an option. Your setting your child up for failure in the future. Of course we all have to do things we don't want to do sometimes! It's part of life. To accomplish anything in life, it is inevitable that you will come encounter with certain tasks that you "don't feel like doing" or "your too tired" to do. If you teach them now that not feeling like doing something is a valid excuse then they will never accomplish anything in their life.

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Children having to do chores

Submitted by a reader (not verified) on 4 September, 2011 - 18:13

First of all, children never asked to be born in the first place; even with all this talk about human rights and unfair treatment, children were never asked to be brought into this world. Why is this. Then again, parents are allowed to make their messes, mix up their lives, rent homes in bad condition with cracked driveways, and rents that are too high.... And act as if it is their fault (the children's) that circumstances are unfavorable? It is not the child's fault that the parent has to work hard to provide. It's what they were asking for. Like buying an expensive car and expecting it to take care of itself. Your responsibility as a parent is to nurture, care for, and help children, who are just small adults- with the same feelings, doubts and fears, and who need to be treated with respect. Herein lies the

need for communication and trust. Children want to help out, but when all you've taught them that life can offer is television, inactivity and videogames for recreation, and then go on and on about them having to do more, especially when the more that they have to do, you make it out to seem unfair when you have to do it..... I have seen children asked to mow the lawn in the blazing sun, with no respect for what may be painful. Why? Have you no sense to see that it does not benefit the child, that the child is different from you, and the child is not under the care of your parents and were not grown up in the same way? Each child is different and should be treated that way. That said, some discipline is in order, but even when saying that I am at war within myself, because most things that pass for discipline have no way of helping the children really, not just in the future, but to exist in a happy family each day. Not having to worry about having to earn love and respect which they should have. Thank you and please comment.

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