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Chores Can Help Your Child Learn about Teamwork and a Strong Work Ethic

Chores can help develop a sense of responsibility and self worth in your child. It should be understood by all family members that chores are expected and necessary to a household running successfully and efficiently. They can help create a sense of unity and family and are a great way for your child to learn about teamwork. Parents should take special care to handle the delegation of chores to children so they don't become a source of frustration or create arguments.

Allow your child to have an active say in the delegation of chores. Give them choices. We all have household chores that we don't like to do, but if it's a chore the child enjoys doing, then there's less likelihood it will create a battle in the end. The child will most likely appreciate having the chance to be heard and having a choice.

It's imperative that you set parameters early on for the successful completion of a chore. They may not perform up to snuff when they first start performing the chore, but show them where improvement is needed and praise them for a strong effort. Also make sure the child understands there will be repercussions if they only put forth a minimal effort. Ensure that the child understands the need for the chore's effective and efficient completion. Set consequences for substandard completion as a team. Make sure they see that if they don't perform their chores, it affects the other members of the team. Spouses must work together and be a strong example for their children by completing their own chores each day. And don't allow a child to undermine your authority by battling with you over a designated chore. Stand your ground and don't give in, and emphasize the consequence and negative effect an uncompleted chore has on the family.

And keep an open mind when a child wants to discuss their thoughts or express their opinions about chores. Make sure the conversation stays positive and on target.

Chart Your Child's Accomplishments with a Chore Chart

It can be very frustrating to ask your child over and over again to complete their chores without them ever getting done. If this describes your house to a tee, consider designing a chore chart. Chores might include taking out the garbage, doing the dishes, cleaning their room, yard work or putting laundry in the laundry room. Each chore has to be done just once or twice a week. Anything more is unrealistic. After your child completes each chore, they can put a check mark on the chore chart. At the end of each week, it's very inspiring for both parent and child to look at the chore chart and easily see that each designated job was completed. Just like us with our 'to do' lists, your child will find great satisfaction in being able to check off each chore as it is completed and take pride knowing they accomplished a set task or list of tasks.

Once you've sat down with your child and discussed and designed a chore chart, it's time to discuss the rewards for accomplishing each task listed. Perhaps at your home you decide you will give a set sum for each task accomplished. If you should decide to grant your child some sort of monetary allowance, make sure it's age appropriate and granted on a regular basis. A good rule of thumb is 50 cents per year of age. So your 8 year old child would earn \$4.00 per week if each chore on the list has been completed. If it has not been, they do not receive their allowance.

This is a great opportunity for you to teach your children the value of both earning and saving money, and also giving back. Perhaps the child can divide their allowance into thirds: 1/3 to spend, 1/3 to save, and 1/3 to use to help those less fortunate than themselves. You might also want to consider designing a 'bank book' for each portion of the allowance and tuck each into three separate coffee cans or money jars, and that way you and your child will be able to keep track of how much has been saved, how much has been spent, and how much of their allowance has gone to help someone else.

Should you decide to use non-monetary incentives as chores payment, be sure you set clear parameters for your child. Be sure they understand that two hours each weekend of their favorite video game or going to see a movie with mom or dad is only earned by completing the chore list successfully each week. You might want to consider writing these on a slip of paper as 'currency' for the child to keep in their 'privilege bank' and they can cash it in with you when they'd like.

Regardless of the method you choose, keep in mind that this can be a valuable tool for both you and your child.

Help Your Child Kick the Thumb Sucking Habit

Thumb sucking is a concern many parents have. Toddlers suck their thumbs because it's comforting and calming. It's probably something they did before they were born, and they revert back to it when they are nervous, agitated, scared or ill. They may also use it to lull themselves back to sleep in the middle of the night.

Parents shouldn't concern themselves unless it continues after the age their permanent teeth begin to appear, around six years old. Experts say that it's the intensity of the thumb sucking and the tongue's thrust that deforms teeth and makes braces necessary later. Children who rest their thumb passively in their mouth are less likely to have difficulty than children who suck aggressively. If you're concerned, closely monitor your child and analyze his or her technique. If they appear to be sucking vigorously, you may want to begin curbing the habit earlier.

Punishing or nagging your child to stop won't help, because it's usually an automatic response. Attempting to curb it by putting an elastic bandage on his or her thumb, or another such method, will seem like unjust punishment, especially since they indulge in the habit for comfort and security.

Try to wait it out. Children usually give up thumb sucking when they've found other ways to calm and comfort themselves. Consider offering them alternatives to comfort themselves with, such as a soft blanket or lullaby toy

The key is to notice when and where your child is likely to suck their thumb and offer an alternative. If it happens while they are tired, try giving more naps. If they suck their thumb frequently while watching television, try to distract them with a toy that will keep their hands occupied.

Older children may need gentle reminders to curtail thumb sucking while in public, and praise should be given freely when the child finds and uses an acceptable alternative. Your child's pediatric dentist can offer other suggestions for helping your child kick the thumb sucking habit.

Hobbies are Healthy

Hobbies benefit children in many ways. They give a child an opportunity to express themselves, discover themselves, and build self-esteem. They are also great educational tools. A child interested in rock collecting learns about geology and science, and a child in writing stories learns about sentence structure and proper grammar. Hobbies teach children to set and achieve goals, solve problems, and make decisions. They can also set the course for what your child becomes later in life, as they often turn into lifelong interests or careers.

Children who have hobbies are usually following in their parents' footsteps, so set a good example by pursuing your own hobby. Your child will need space for their hobby, so find an area designated specifically for the hobby so they can work on it. Realize that hobbies can sometimes be quite messy, so be at the ready for messes, as they come with the territory.

Be available to your child to provide guidance, support, and encouragement. This is a great time to teach your child strong work habits, such as following directions closely, setting goals, and proper planning and organization. Show them that nothing worthwhile is ever easy, especially when they begin to become frustrated with their progress. It's also a good time to teach them about personal responsibility and show them how important it is to properly care for their work area and their 'tools of the trade.'

Children will be more encouraged to work on their hobbies if activities like watching television or playing video games are limited. It's been noted by experts that by age 15, the average child has spent more time watching television than sitting in a classroom. Again, here's where setting a good example is crucial. Instead of watching that four-hour football game on Saturday, turn the TV off and work on your own hobby. Your child may want to join in or work on his or her own, as a result.

Hobbies are rewarding and enriching parts of our lives, so encourage your child to explore their own interests and find a hobby of their very own.

Interrupt Your Child's Interruption Habit

Trying to teach your child not to interrupt can sometimes be an exercise in frustration.

Telling them there's a time to interrupt (in case of a fire) and a time to not interrupt (boredom) isn't enough. Putting these principles into practice is easier said than done, especially for a very verbal or high-energy kid. That's why now is a good time to revisit some basic lessons about good manners and teaching your child to wait their turn to speak.

First of all, set a reasonable expectation. School-aged children have a difficult time holding their thoughts for more than a few minutes. Indicate to them as best as you can that you'll be with them as soon as possible and then stay true to your word.

Develop some ideas for them to occupy themselves with while you're on the phone or otherwise unavailable. Keep a box full of puzzles, crayons, colorful markers or other quiet toys nearby that they can only use when you have to make a call. Set snacks and drinks on an accessible level so they don't have to interrupt you for help.

When you need to make a call or have an important conversation with a visitor, head off trouble by saying you're about to phone someone or have a conversation and estimate how long you expect to talk. Ask them if they need anything before you make your call or have your conversation with your company. Then, do your best to adhere to that time schedule, and excuse yourself from the conversation long enough to check on them. Let them know you'll be a bit longer if that's the case and see if they need anything before returning to your conversation.

Reading is a great tool to teach manners. Find several books on the subject, and then read them together. Discuss afterwards what your child learned from the story and how they'll handle a similar situation in their life the next time it occurs.

And as always, children learn what they live. Your child is very unlikely to learn not to interrupt if they hear you, your spouse, or their siblings constantly interrupting each other. Your actions have a strong influence on your child, so be a good example. Ask permission to speak before speaking, and apologize when you inadvertently interrupt.

Productive and Positive Potty Training

Your child is showing all the signs of being ready to potty train. That's great! But now, where do you start?

Explain to your toddler that going potty is a normal process of life, and everyone does it, even animals. Talk with them about the toilet, a special place where they can potty just like the big kids. Tell them how the potty works and let them try flushing themselves. Explain that they will be wearing underwear and not diapers. Find some educational and entertaining videos of their favorite characters learning to go potty. Be sure to involve other family members in the process and emphasize the importance of consistency during this process.

Make a special trip to the store and purchase new underwear with your toddler. Let them have a voice in what you get. The underwear will have much more significance if your toddler helped choose them.

Overalls, pants with lots of buttons, snaps or zips, tight or restrictive clothing and oversized shirts will all be obstacles to your child during this process. Put these kinds of clothes away for the time being.

Decide whether or not you're going to use pull-ups, training pants or regular underwear and try to stick with this decision so your child has consistency and isn't confused. Think about whether or not you want to use rewards or not. Figure out a strategy on how to handle potty issues when you're away from home.

If your child is in child care, ask your provider for their advice and make sure there aren't any hard and fast rules the center or caregiver has in place that may be an issue. Let them know that you're going to start and enlist their help with the process.

Praise your child for each successful trip to the potty and comfort them when accidents happen. Try to remain patient and calm when they do. Avoid using candy or other treats as reinforcement. Let them know that it will take a while to get the hang of using the potty, and encourage and praise each attempt they make. With consistency, encouragement and praise, they will soon be completely trained.

Providing a Safe and Secure Home for Your Child

Accidents in the home are the primary cause of death in U.S. children. By taking a few simple precautions, these injuries can be avoided, making your home safe for your child and the children who visit it.

In your kitchen, you should be sure to install safety latches on cabinets and drawers. This helps keep children out of the everyday household chemicals you use to clean your home and dishware with and also keeps them from grabbing sharp objects like scissors or knives from inside the drawers. Use the back burners when cooking on the stovetop and keep the handles of your pots and pans turned out of a curious child's reach while cooking.

Safety latches should be installed on cabinets and drawers in your bathrooms, as well, to keep them out of unsafe household cleaning products and medicines. Be sure to unplug any electrical appliances, such as blow dryers or curling irons, directly after use, and put them out of a child's reach. Teach children early on that electricity and water do not mix and that no electrical appliances of any kind should ever be immersed in or placed under running water. Toilet locks should also be used in homes that have small children to keep lids down. Young children are 'top heavy' and can easily fall into a toilet if they lean in to play in it. Since a young child can drown in less than an inch of water, it is imperative to closely supervise them in the bathroom at all times.

Around your house, be sure to secure furniture, such as bookshelves and heavy furniture that could tip easily, to the wall using brackets. Use doorknob covers to keep children out of rooms with potential hazards and to keep them from leaving the house unsupervised. Make sure your window blinds do not have looped cords on them, as they can present a strangulation hazard to a young child. And always cover your electrical outlets with protective covers to keep small fingers from them and small objects from being inserted into them.

Check your house over carefully for other potential hazards and address them immediately. With these precautions and some common sense, your household will be your child's haven.

Tactics for Tackling a Toddler's Temper Tantrum

Even the best-behaved toddler has an occasional temper tantrum. A tantrum can range from whining and crying to screaming, kicking, hitting, and breath holding. They are equally common in boys and girls and usually occur from age 1 to age 3. Some children may experience regular tantrums, whereas for other children, tantrums may be rare. Some kids are more prone to throwing a temper tantrum than others.

Toddlers are trying to master the world, and when they aren't able to accomplish a task, they often use one of the only tools at their disposal for venting frustration - a tantrum. There are several basic causes of tantrums that are familiar to parents everywhere: The child is seeking attention, or is tired, hungry, or uncomfortable. In addition, tantrums are often the result of children's frustration with the world. Frustration is an unavoidable part of kids' lives as they learn how people, objects, and their own bodies work.

Tantrums are common during the second year of life, a time when children are acquiring language. Toddlers generally understand more than they can express. As language skills improve, tantrums tend to decrease.

Keep off-limits objects out of sight and out of reach, which will make struggles less likely to develop over them. Distract your child. Take advantage of your little one's short attention span by offering a replacement for the coveted object or beginning a new activity to replace the frustrating or forbidden one. And choose your battles: consider the request carefully when your child wants something. Is it outrageous? Maybe it isn't. Accommodate, when possible, to avoid an outburst.

Make sure your child isn't acting up simply because he or she isn't getting enough attention. To a child, negative attention (a parent's response to a tantrum) is better than no attention at all. Try to establish a habit of catching your child being good ("time in"), which means rewarding your little one with attention and praise for positive behavior. This will teach them that acting appropriately makes mommy and daddy happy and proud, and they'll be anxious to do it again and again.

Take the Bite out of Your Toddler's Biting Problem

The majority of toddlers engage in some biting between their first and third birthdays. Probably the most common reason is that it is one of the few ways of communicating that are effective for them, before verbal skills are developed. However, not all children bite. Some choose other forms of communication, such as grabbing, shoving, or punching.

Another reason toddlers bite is to express frustration, a feeling which is very common with toddlers, because both their communication skills and their motor skills are so limited.

To a young toddler it can be funny to see mommy suddenly bolt upright or for a playmate to start crying. Toddlers may also bite because they're teething or because they put everything in their mouths anyway, so why not someone's arm? It could even be something as simple as hunger.

But how do you teach your child not to bite? Make it perfectly clear that the biting is hurtful and wrong, and point out to your child how much pain their biting has caused. Express that biting is wrong and unacceptable, and that neither mommy or daddy like it.

If you discover that your child is biting out of frustration, try giving them an alternative way to express to people that they are having a difficult time. Though language is a difficult task at this age, most toddlers can be taught words that are appropriate for such a situation. For instance, "You need to tell mommy or daddy that you need help and not bite us," or "Show mommy what you need, but don't bite. You'll hurt her if you bite, and I know you don't want to hurt mommy, do you?"

Experts agree that parents should try not to give biting so much attention that it becomes an attention-getter. This is true of all behavior that you don't want to see repeated. Firmly tell the child again that there is no biting allowed, that it is wrong, and that it hurts people.

The Family that Eats Together Stays Healthy Together

Recent studies have shown that not only do children like to sit down at the dinner table and eat a meal with their parents, but they also are more likely to eat a well-balanced, nutritious meal when they do. But with the hectic lives we seem to lead these days, getting the family all together in the same place at the same time can be a difficult chore. Between work schedules, after-school activities, errands, and the like, it seems we have less and less time. But with a few simple ideas and some planning, meal time can be an enjoyable and treasured family time.

Designate no less than one night per week to have a sit-down meal with your family. Sunday nights are usually a good choice for this, because you have more time to relax and the weekend chores have been completed.

Involve your children in the meal planning and preparation. This gives them a strong sense of self and the foundation for a lifetime of healthy meal planning and preparation.

Make sure the television is off and make it a rule that all phone calls go to voice mail or the answering machine during the meal. Take this time to visit with one another and enjoy one another's company. This is a great time to reconnect and find out what events happened this week. Take your time eating, and teach your children how to do the same in the process. Eating slowly is a healthy habit. Don't jump up and start clearing dishes and putting things away until everyone is done eating and talking.

On those days that you can't sit down as a family, try to make a habit of sitting down and chatting with your child while they are eating, instead of rushing around catching up on the chores. This shows them that you're interested, and that you care and want to be an involved and important part of their every day life.

The Importance of a Regular Routine to Your Child

Regular schedules provide the day with a structure that orders a young child's world. Although predictability can be tiresome for adults, children thrive on repetition and routine. Schedules begin from the first days of life. Babies, especially, need regular sleep and meal programs and even routines leading up to those activities.

As they get older, when a child knows what is going to happen and who is going to be there, it allows them to think and feel more independently, and feel more safe and secure. A disrupted routine can set a child off and cause them to feel insecure and irritable.

Dinner time is a great place to start setting a routine. Sitting together at the dinner table gives children the opportunity to share their day and talk about their feelings. This is also a great time to include some responsibility in your child's routine, such as helping to set or clear the table.

And regardless of how exhausted you or your children may be, don't be tempted to skip winding down from the day. This is part of a nighttime ritual and allows both child and parent to decompress after a busy day. It also helps bedtime go more smoothly. This is usually the time of day when parent and child can spend some quality time together, so fight the urge to start the laundry or do the dishes until after the child has gone to bed. If this isn't possible, consider trading off these duties with your spouse each night to ensure your child has quality time with each parent on a regular basis. Take the time to find out what wind-down strategy works best for your child. Some children are actually energized instead of relaxed by a warm bath, so if that's the case with your child, bath time should be saved for a different time of day. Whatever routine you settle on, make it quiet, relaxing, and tranquil for everyone.

And though routines are essential, there should be some room to be flexible as well. You might be out late at night on a family outing, or have unexpected company show up that may result in a skipped meal or nap in the car while running errands in the evening. In these instances, it's important for you to keep your cool. If you express frustration or anger about the disruption of the routine, your child will as well. Prepare children for such unexpected events and show them that though it can happen from time to time, the routine will return the next day.

The Positive Influence of Being Involved in Your Child's Education

It has been shown many times over in research studies that a parent who is involved in their child's education has a positive impact. It's reflected in improved grades and test scores, strong attendance, a higher rate of homework completion, higher graduation rates, improved attitudes and behaviors in the child, as well as the child being more likely to become involved in positive extra-curricular activities. Send out the message early in your child's education that your home is an involved and active supporter of their learning.

Probably the most important element of a positive learning environment at home is structure. But what is too little or too much? If we're too lenient or expect too little, your child may become disorganized or unmotivated. If we're too rigid and strict, it can cause undue pressure or cause your child to feel unable to deliver on your expectations.

So what's the best way to meet in the middle and create a positive learning environment for your child at home?

Help your child develop a work area where they can study and focus without being interrupted. Children usually do better when they have a private study area away from interruption. If your child prefers doing their work at the kitchen table, make sure other family members understand the kitchen is off-limits during study time. Make sure your child has plenty of supplies and reference materials available and that the area has plenty of light. Regardless of its location, ensure the area is quiet and that your child can study and work uninterrupted.

Agree on a regular time for studying. To help your child make homework a habit, schedule a set time each day for homework. Perhaps breaking study time up into smaller increments would work better for your child than one solid period. Work with your child to find out what works best for them. In addition, be sure your child has a sufficient break between the time they arrive home from school and the time they sit down to work, in order to 'decompress' from their school day.

Help your child develop a method of keeping track of homework assignments. This can be a difficult chore for some students. Developing a successful way of keeping track of assignments, then scratching them off as completed, helps them develop a productive method for accomplishing tasks later in life.

Develop a positive line of communication with your child's teacher. Teachers are usually very willing and excited to work with an involved parent to help the child's overall success in school. Whether it's notes sent back and forth in your child's backpack or an e-mail correspondence, make sure your teacher knows you're open for suggestions as to how to better assist them in the homework and study process at home.

The Truth about Lying

Honesty and dishonesty are learned in the home. Parents are often concerned when their child or adolescent lies.

Young children often make up stories and tell tall tales. This is normal activity, because they enjoy hearing stories and making up stories for fun. These young children may blur the distinction between reality and fantasy. This is probably more a result of an active imagination than an attempt to deliberately lie about something.

An older child or adolescent may tell a lie to be self-serving, such as denying responsibility or to try to get out of a chore or task. Parents should respond to isolated instances of lying by talking with the youngster about the importance of truthfulness, honesty and trust.

Some adolescents discover that lying may be considered acceptable in certain situations, such as not telling a boyfriend or girlfriend the real reasons for breaking up with them because they don't want to hurt their feelings. Other adolescents may lie to protect their privacy or to help them feel psychologically separate and independent from their parents.

Parents are the most important role models for their children. When a child or adolescent lies, parents should take some time to have a serious talk and discuss the difference between make believe and reality, and lying and telling the truth. They should open an honest line of communication to find out exactly why the child chose to tell a lie, and to discuss alternatives to lying. A parent should lead by example and never lie, and when they are caught in a lie, express remorse and regret for making a conscious decision to tell a lie. Clear, understandable consequences for lying should be discussed with the child early on.

However, some forms of lying are cause for concern, and might indicate an underlying emotional problem. Some children who know the difference between truthfulness and lying tell elaborate stories which appear believable. Children or adolescents usually relate these stories with enthusiasm because they receive a lot of attention as they tell the lie.

Other children or adolescents who otherwise seem responsible fall into a pattern of repetitive lying. They often feel that lying is the easiest way to deal with the demands of parents, teachers and friends. These children are usually not trying to be bad or malicious, but the repetitive pattern of lying becomes a bad habit. A serious repetitive pattern of lying should be cause for concern. Consult a professional adolescent or child psychologist to find out whether help is needed.

The Whys of Whining

"Mooooooooooooom!"

It's irritating, it's frustrating and it gets on your last nerve. Though it's obnoxious and unacceptable, it's actually an effective way for your child to get your attention. It's whining. But, like other bad habits, you can nip it in the bud early on with a few simple strategies to teach your child there are other appropriate, effective forms of communicating with you.

First, try limiting the situations that trigger it. Avoid extra errands when the kids are hungry. Don't let them get involved in a frustrating game or project prior to bedtime. Pay attention when your child is talking, as sometimes whining is a reaction when a child feels you aren't giving them your full attention. Praise them for not whining and talking in a normal and understandable voice that allows you to fully understand what they are saying to you.

When the whining begins, don't overreact. Keep your response simple, calm and neutral. Ask your child to repeat the request in a normal tone. When giving in seems inevitable, don't delay. If you must finish the grocery shopping so you can put dinner on the table, for instance, and your child starts whining for a snack, offer something healthy right away.

Once a limit has been set, parents should follow through. It's imperative that both parents are on board with this limit and fully follow through when the whining rule has been violated.

If you have an older child that's developing a whining habit, suggest they come up with a solution to their perceived boredom or other voiced problem. If you suggest possible alternatives, it might just prolong the child's whining.

Sometimes whining can be the result of trauma and trouble in their life. A divorce, serious family illness or problems at school may be at the root. Additional positive attention and quality one-on-one time may be just the medicine your child needs at a time like this. Your pediatrician can also suggest alternatives to curb whining should the positive attention and disciplinary actions be ineffective.

Training the Fussy Eater

Toddlers can be fussy eaters who refuse to try a new food at least half of the time. Approximately half of all toddlers fit this description, so it is no wonder that food issues are a source of stress for parents.

Establishing healthy eating patterns is important to avoid problems such as obesity and eating disorders later in life. Various strategies can help your child accept a wider range of foods. It may be necessary to offer a food to your child as many as 10 different times before they choose to eat it. The problem is, many parents get frustrated and give up before the fourth or fifth try.

Try to make foods fun. Colorful foods like carrot sticks, raisins, apples, grapes, cheese sticks and crackers can all be fun and healthy choices for your growing toddler. Explain to them that eating good food is important so they'll grow big and strong, and how it will help them run faster and play longer.

Children learn behaviors from their parents. If you restrict yourself to a narrow range of foods, your child will take notice and mimic your caution. Don't limit your child's food variety to only those foods you prefer. It may be that your child's tastes are different from yours, and perhaps you are simply serving them foods they don't happen to like. Try to set a good example and try a variety of foods in front of your child. It could motivate them to do the same.

If your child seems healthy and energetic, then they are eating enough. If you are still concerned, keep an eye on how much food they actually eat over the course of a day. Children tend to graze constantly, rather than restrict their eating to three meals per day like adults. You may be surprised how those little handfuls and snacks add up. For further reassurance, check your child's growth and weight charts, or check with your child's pediatrician.

Try not to worry and remember that unless a child is ill, they will eat. Children are very good at judging their hunger and fullness signals. Try to stay relaxed about mealtime and offer your child a wide variety of foods, and most importantly, remember to set a good example by trying a wide variety of foods yourself. You may discover you and your toddler share a new found favorite food!