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Family Focus Are Your Children Helping Enough at Home?

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practice who regret not having these kinds of expectations for their children. If parents allow their children to avoid pitching in with family chores, they run the risk of becoming subservient to their children's needs. Children will see that their needs trump any family or parent needs, and consequently they may develop characteristics of entitlement and self-absorption. As these children get older, they may very well become insensitive to the needs of parents and others. Training them to help and think of others at an early age helps instill responsibility, thoughtfulness and consideration.

You can begin with simple tasks when your children are 3 or 4 years old. Young children can put the napkins on the table for meals or put a cup of dog or cat food in a bowl. Some parents have their children pick certain chores from a list so that they have some choice. Other families trade off chores among their children on a weekly or monthly basis so that no one is stuck for very long with tasks they dislike. The important thing is to develop a plan and stick to it until it becomes a natural part of your family functioning. You may need to think long-term, since training your children to do a good job and comply consistently can actually take months to incorporate.

Parents who elicit this type of cooperation from their children at an early age have an advantage. They can avoid, or at least reduce, what parents of older children may well incur at first: negativity and passive or active resistance. Training older children often requires a very positive approach. Parents need to demonstrate appreciation, flexibility, and collaboration with their children. It is important to obtain children's buy-in to the general concept of helping others in the family before negotiating the specific tasks that will be involved. You need to expect that it may not be a perfect implementation with older children. If your children contribute to the family's well-being on a regular basis, if not perfectly, it is still cause to celebrate your parenting skills. You will have enhanced your family's cohesiveness and your children's emotional health.

Our children are busier than ever these days. There seems to be more homework, longer and more frequent sports practices and games or meets, more pressure to participate in a variety of extracurricular activities, and of course more pressure to succeed. Many parents tell me that they want their kids to do regular chores at home, but they don't see how it's possible given their hectic schedules. The choice might be between chores and sleep.

I hear from many parents (and know from my own experience too), that it is actually harder to set up and enforce chore implementation than it is just to do it yourself. As a result, there are many grumbling parents around who know their kids are getting off the hook, but who are too busy to do something about the situation.

As parents, you don't want to be the ones to place additional burdens on your children when they are already busy and stressed. After all, their job is to do well in school and in their other activities. Why have them fold laundry when it's so easy to do it yourself? They're only young once, so do they really need to spend their limited time vacuuming or changing their sheets?

Some parents think their children are helping enough by putting away their toys, or later on, putting their own dishes in the dishwasher or doing their own laundry. To be sure, these tasks are helpful and important. But what I am suggesting is that they learn to do more than just take care of their own possessions. They need to pitch in with chores that help out others in the family and the family as a whole.

Through the years, I have seen many families in my

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[back](#)

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