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Having regular chores helps children learn responsibility, experts say

Children will rise to the occasion when given responsibility of regular chores, parenting experts say,



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Amanda Lee and her two kids, Conan, 8, and Pippa, 5, find time to play a board game after all their chores are finished.

By: Amanda Lee Special to the Star, Published on Mon Aug 19 2013

Growing up in a one-parent household, I recall having a lot of responsibility as a child. Probably more than the average kid. So why then did I give my kids a free pass when it came to helping around the house?

“Typically, kids experience chores as free slave labour and they don’t want to do it,” says author and parenting coach [Alyson Schafer](#).

This was certainly my son’s reaction to the idea of helping around the house.

“Instead,” adds Schafer, “we want children to be part of a team.”

While I wasn’t looking to turn my children’s lives into a Dickensian narrative, I was tired of living in a house that could be featured in an episode of *Hoarders*. I came to the conclusion I wasn’t helping my kids by not acquainting them with a vacuum cleaner, at least.

Schafer suggests having a family meeting to discuss chores. She says children have a high sense of fairness and parents can list their current burden of jobs around the house.

“Explain, ‘If you can help with this, then we can all have more family time,’ ” she says.

Over dinner, I discussed my plans with Conan, 8, and Pippa, 6. They would be expected to take on regular chores, some of which I proposed in order to keep the house clean — like taking dishes to the sink after meals — while giving them a say in others.

“I’ll cook pancakes for breakfast once a week,” Conan volunteered.

Schafer suggests parents think creatively about the talents and strengths of their children.

“You might have a 12-year-old girl who likes power tools,” she says.

“And give them real responsibility, such as researching a new vet for a pet, and they will rise to the occasion.”

To help get us started, we downloaded [ChoreMonster](#). The mobile app lets kids log in and earn points and rewards. Rewards do not have to be cold hard cash; they could be a trip to the park or popcorn and a movie.

While the app is a great tool for bringing some fun into work, a simple chart posted on the fridge works as a visible reminder for kids.

Lena Rogers, an Oakville mother of four, says all of her kids, apart from her toddler, are expected to help. They range in age from 18 months and 10 years of age.

“I think they need to contribute to the family responsibility,” she says.

Mitchell, 9, cleans up after dinner, including loading the dishwasher and wiping down the benches and table. Kane, 9, is responsible for cleaning out the cat litter. Zachery, 7, feeds the cat and removes the garbage from the kitchen when it needs emptying.

“They’re learning how to do things for themselves to become independent human beings.”

“Chores are fundamental to self-esteem,” says Schafer. “Chores help create a greater sense of resilience and helps [kids] rise to life’s challenges.”

What surprised me is how much my children wanted to help when presented with the opportunity. They picked up apples in the garden. Conan cleaned the windows. Pippa demonstrated she could clean a bathroom — she scrubbed the sink and even braved cleaning the toilet bowl.

I also found that I could combine a little learning with housework when I dictated the shopping list to Conan.

[Kathy Buckworth](#), the author of *I Am So the Boss of You*, pays her children to do chores, unlike many parents.

“I believe this is the way the real world works; you work hard, you do it right, and you get rewarded for it,” she says.

Buckworth’s children have regular chores such as putting away laundry, but the author also lists other chores on the fridge with the associated payment. “For instance, fishing a dead mouse out of the swimming pool. I pay \$5 for that!”

For older children who may already have busy lives, Schafer suggests making them responsible for jobs that are not time sensitive, such as cutting the grass, and save taking out the garbage for you.

Tackling chores as a family brought us closer together. Spending our Saturday with music blasting as we cleaned the house, we were a team.

My son is under the impression that now I’ve written about the experience, all bets are off. Someone should tell him I’ll be expecting pancakes for breakfast. And the floor needs sweeping.