

GREAT EXPECTATIONS AND GENUINE ACCOUNTABILITY (5-3-18)

Set clear expectations and hold your kids accountable when they don't meet those expectations. No bribes or rewards of cash payment – remember, those kinds of short-term incentives can be used to kick-start motivation, but don't work as a long-term strategy. Besides, the message should not be that one contributes to a family in exchange for money, but that one contributes because one is an integral part of a cooperative unit, a group of people who depend on each other for both labor and love.

Explain to your children from an early age that you expect them to contribute to the running of the household. If they are older and have never been asked to contribute before, be honest. Cop to the fact that you failed yourself and have been underestimating their abilities all along. Brainstorm as a family about jobs the kids are capable of learning and come up with a list of expectations. You can post or not post this list – that's up to you – but the expectations have to be clear and age-appropriate. One mom I know draws pictures of dishes, or a washing machine, or a lunchbox for her little kids who can't yet read while the lists are written out for her older children.

STEP AWAY AND HOLD YOUR TONGUE

Once you've outlined your expectations for your children, explain that you will not be nagging them until they complete their responsibilities. If your daughter's job is to clean up her place after meals and rinse the dishes putting them in the dishwasher, and she forgets, leave the dishes out. This is where the teachable moments happen. Explain to her that the once easily risible food dries over time, and it will be much harder to clean it off when she finally gets around to it, but the dishes will remain on the table, waiting for her to clean them up.

This is going to require a lot of restraint on your part. Nagging and pestering is the fastest way to destroy motivation as well as destroy your connection and relationship with your child. Even if that dish sits on the table for two days, don't nag or hover, and absolutely no swooping or fixing, but be present and help problem-solve. Parenting coach and author Vicki Hoeflich calls this method "duct tape parenting" because yes, sometimes keeping our mouths shut and holding ourselves back from interfering in these learning moments requires something as strong as duct tape. Keep the concept of autonomy-supportive parenting in mind and offer support, not control. Be there to help if he is not sure about a cycle setting on the washer, or if something goes horribly awry with the fabric softener but find something absorbing to do while he goes about the work. No butting in, no prompting, and no correcting unless asked. Oh, and one last thing. If you go behind your child's back and redo the chore he has just

finished to his satisfaction, even if it's after he left the room, he'll notice. You will be telling him through your actions not only that he is incompetent, but that you will finish the job if he is careless. That is one lesson you don't want him to learn, both for his sake and for yours.

Praise your children for the effort they put into the chores, particularly if they really had to problem-solve or had to stick with a task that was not going well. When I praised my son for putting those plates away in the high cupboards, I was not praising him for taking on the task, because he knew I expected that of him. Rather, I was praising him for the extra effort, determination, and perseverance he showed when he hit a roadblock.

DITCH THE LOLLIPOPS

If your child has become addicted to the rewards you have been offering for helping out, you have a little extra work ahead of you to reorient her thinking. Questions of "What do I get if I do that?" and "How much will you pay me?" must give way to a new motivation, and the transition can take time and patience. First, stop using rewards as your default strategy. If you must reward for household duties, try to put off the reward for as long as possible in order to disengage the reward from the actual task, or make the reward nonmaterial. Keep in mind that the little kids can only wait for a short period of time, but older kids can wait for much longer. The goal is to remove the task from the reward and shift their focus back toward internal motivators. As you move away from material rewards, talk about how rewarding it is to do a job well. Explain why you are not offering material rewards and why household participation is so important. Reward with praise the effort and patience your child had to exhibit in order to complete the task, even if it took many tries. Especially if it took many tries.

The key to successfully instilling a sense of responsibility and pride, and helping children understand that they have a role to play in the family dynamic, is to start young. Even toddlers, with their diminutive hands and limited attention spans, can begin to explore their ability and competence in shared household responsibilities. When dealing with younger children be sure to make your expectations clear and age-appropriate. Katie Hurley, child and adolescent psychotherapist and mother of two, gave me her perspective on how she empowers her young children with their household contributions:

My kids are still little, and certainly responsibilities change and attitudes toward these responsibilities change over time. I think what I've done well with mine is instead of creating some nagging revolving wheel of chores, I established age-

appropriate expectations and I adjust those as they grow. Telling Riley she can use special wood cleaner to clean all the wood furniture in the house empowered her to feel more responsible. Giving Liam the power of the Swiffer to dry mop gave him a bump in his confidence. We have family cleaning days where we all pitch in and then do something fun after, but I try to keep it mellow and don't place undue stress on it. Our mentality here is that we all live here and we help each other out. They may not make their beds the way I would, but the beds are made and they have pride and ownership -win/win. I see a lot of very controlling parents in my practice. Everything has to be perfect or punishments are the result. That's a mistake, and only ends up creating resentment and anxiety.

Communicate family participation as a privilege, or even a game, and toddlers can accomplish more than you might expect. (In the book the authors give specific age-appropriate chore lists on page 86 and 87).

As children graduate from toddlerhood and move toward preschool, start teaching them how to manage more complicated duties. Kids between three and five are big fans of counting and sorting, so give them jobs around the house that encourage them to practice those skills while instilling responsibility. Ask them to put five books on that shelf or ask them to count out five oranges and place them in a bag at the store.

Children as young as five can understand and accept the consequences of their actions (and inaction), but only if they experience those consequences. Left her bagel on the coffee table and the dog ate it? Don't make her a new one and she will remember not to leave it within reach of the dog's mouth next time. Forgot to put her favorite DVD away in its case after she watched it? The next time she wants to watch that movie, don't help her look for it in the pile of loose DVDs, and remind her why she can't find it. Refuses to put her clothes in the hamper? She won't have her favorite pink sweatshirt to wear to preschool. Left her favorite stuffed animal at school? She won't have that particular nighttime friend to cuddle with when the lights go out.

These responsibilities and the lessons they carry are not really about DVDs or stuffed animals. They are about learning how to be responsible, to show initiative, and to follow through. They are about learning how to be the sort of person who will be able to manage the demands life will place on them. If you constantly bail your child out, she learns a lot from that, too. She learns that self-sufficiency is not really necessary because you'll always pick up the pieces and that there's no real need to come up with any sort of system or plan for

remembering her responsibilities in the future.

NEXT WEEK...THE HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE SCHOOL-AGE KIDS