

Pastoral Spotlight November 2021

One Unexpected Way To Ensure Your Child's Wellbeing After COVID-19

So much is being mentioned regarding wellbeing right now and a large majority of this concern centres around children. Many academics ponder the effects of the pandemic on the mental health of the younger generation. Scores of parents and teachers around the world are searching for ways to improve wellbeing.

You may think that my suggestion is old fashioned at best and slightly unusual at worst but I will try to convince you that your child will gain much from doing chores around the house.

In this day and age it seems unfashionable to involve the youngest members of the family in daily tasks. Sometimes parents wonder if they should really give their children chores. After all, isn't it the parents' responsibility to manage the household? And don't children need an opportunity to 'just be kids' for now because they have the rest of their lives to worry about chores?

Most children have really busy schedules in the 21st century. They rush around from one activity to the next with little time to set the table or cut the grass. Despite those concerns, however, giving your child chores may be one of the most important things you'll ever do.

Research from a well-known 75-year Harvard study examined the childhood psychosocial variables and biological processes that predicted health and wellbeing later in life.¹

The researchers concluded that, 'Chores were the best predictor of which kids were more likely to become happy, healthy, independent adults.'²

Chores offer children a chance to feel capable and also help them to feel part of a family team or community.

In an ideal scenario it appears like the perfect solution to improve well being but most parents would argue that children are so resistant to participating in chores that the ensuing conflict is just not worth it.

In the following paragraphs I have gathered a variety of arguments for recommending that children undertake chores. The ideas are selected from a wide range of sources around the world which are credited at the end of the article. Finish reading the positive benefits of doing chores and reserve your judgement until the end.

Children are naturally going to resist doing activities which do not appear to directly benefit them and also which appear to be less fun and perhaps rather monotonous. The very word 'chore' is defined in the dictionary in two ways; firstly as 'a routine task', but secondly as 'a tedious but necessary task'. Children do not immediately recognise the importance of emptying the dishwasher or sorting the washing until there are no plates left to use or they can't find their favourite jumper as it is still in the laundry basket.

As they grow up, children will begin to gain a better maturity and an awareness of the needs of the whole family. Until they gain these two elements they will naturally lack the motivation to do chores spontaneously. Part of the job of a parent is to socialize children during the 18 or 20 years that they live with their parents by helping them to develop these mature qualities. Therefore, it should not be a surprise that they resist helping at home.

Insisting that chores be completed can feel like a never-ending battle. Sometimes it may feel that one is always having to push to get the child to complete their assigned tasks and, especially if one is feeling weary it occasionally feels easier to do the job yourself.

Research proves over and over that children will benefit from the experience of completing chores, despite the daily grind of having to enforce parental expectations.

Research indicates that those children who do have a set of chores have higher self-esteem, are more responsible, and are better able to deal with frustration and delay gratification, all of which contribute to greater success in school.

Furthermore, research by Marty Rossman⁽³⁾ shows that involving children in household tasks at an early age can have a positive impact later in life. In fact, says Rossman, “the best predictor of young adults’ success in their mid-20’s was that they participated in household tasks when they were three or four.”

A very good article in ‘Click on Detroit’ outlines many positives about chores and is précised below:

Life Skills

Doing chores gives a child the opportunity **to give back** to their parents for all that has been done for them. Children begin to see themselves as important contributors to the family. They feel a connection to the family.

Holding them accountable for their chores can increase a sense of themselves as responsible and actually **make them more responsible**. Children will feel more capable for having met their obligations and completed their tasks.

One of the most frequently sited causes of over-indulgence stems from parents doing too much for their children and not expecting enough of them. Not being taught the skills of everyday living can limit children’s ability to function at age appropriate levels.

For example:

5-year-old Sara goes to kindergarten and is one of the few students who has no idea how to put on and button her own coat.

Sam, age 7, goes to a friend’s house for dinner but does not know how to pour juice for himself.

Fast forward to Beth who at age 18 goes away to college not knowing how to do her own laundry.

By expecting children to complete self-care tasks and to help with household chores, parents equip children with the skills to **function independently in the outside world**.

With only so many hours in a day, parents need to help children decide how to spend their time and to determine what is most important.

Self-Esteem

If children are let off the hook for chores because they have too much schoolwork or need to practise a sport, then it suggests, intentionally or not, that their academic or athletic skills are most important.

If children then fail a test or fail to stop a goal in a game of football, then they have failed at what parents deem to be most important. They do not have **other pillars of competency** upon which to rely.

By completing household tasks, they may not always be the star student or athlete, but they will know that they can contribute to the family, begin to take care of themselves, and learn skills that they will need as an adult.

Role Modelling

As Barbara Coloroso suggests in her book [Kids Are Worth It!](#), if parents “do chores with a sense of commitment, patience and humour, our children will have a model to do likewise.”

- You can send the message that chores are a bore and something to be avoided at all costs.
- Conversely, you can send the message that these are the tasks that need to be completed in order for your household to run smoothly and that everyone in the family is encouraged and expected to participate.

Encouraging Participation

Young children naturally want to be a part of the family and want to help. Ideally, parents will encourage their participation (even if it takes more work on the parent’s part in the short run).

For example:

By the age of three, youngsters can be assigned their own tasks, for which they are responsible, such as pulling up the sheets on their bed or placing the napkins on the table or sorting the laundry.

The size of the task does not matter; the responsibility associated with it does.

Assigning Chores

For those parents who did not begin a chore regimen when their child was little, it is not too late to start a plan now. It can take some time to think about what tasks the family need help with, what life skills the children need to learn, and what are each child’s interests and abilities.

Consider these Questions

- What chores do you want completed in your home?
- Are the ones already selected the best fit for your child and ones that are most meaningful to the running of your household?
- Are there life skills that a particular child needs to learn?
- Do you want to tie allowance to chore completion?

Ask for Input

As you contemplate these decisions, you can ask your child for their input. Children are more cooperative when they have a say. Also, brainstorm ideas for overcoming any obstacles you have faced in the past, such as children not following through, arguing, or not doing a thorough job.

Hold Family Meetings

Many parents hold a family meeting to discuss chores and when and how they will be starting, revising, or re-instating them. Such times together can build morale, improve relationships, and facilitate creative problem solving.

Update your Chore Plan

Some families use birthdays as natural markers for examining what responsibilities as well as what privileges their children are receiving.

Other, naturally occurring breaks that lend themselves to instituting or revisiting a chore plan include the beginning or end of the school year or returning from holidays.

Pocket Money

One question that parents frequently ask is whether pocket money should be tied to the completion of chores. This is a personal call, with experts weighing in on both sides.

Getting children involved in household chores is more valuable than it might appear. Telling children to do tasks such as putting away their toys, cleaning dishes and vacuuming can teach them responsibility and improve their mental health.

Parents have been looking for ways to navigate the coronavirus (COVID-19). Experts said chores can be a game changer.

“Even small children, like 2- to 5-year-olds can put away toys where they belong, can put them in appropriate bins or boxes,” said Dr. Anna Groebe, of Bloom Pediatrics. Many adults recognise the therapeutic properties of cleaning, organising and tidying. Experts said that’s true for children, too. Not only do chores keep children busy, but can also help them mentally.

“It really gives them a sense of inclusivity,” Groebe said. “It gives them a feeling of accomplishment when they complete the chores with you. It makes them feel like they’re

part of something greater and contributing right now, which I think is all very important for their health and mental wellbeing.”

During the pandemic children had to spend more time indoors or in their playrooms and having them help keep their own space clean relieves stress.

“Being able to put their doll where it belongs, or put their red cars with their other red cars, you know, can also give them that feeling on control, which really helps settle in times like these (when) everything is so uncertain,” Groebe said. “It’s also really important to help decrease clutter in the child’s home because that can actually lower their anxiety levels. So if their toys are everywhere in terms of getting out of control, we can help them be part of the clean-up process that gives them a sense of independence and control, as well as maybe making them feel a little more settled.”

It is hoped that this perspective has offered encouragement to face the complaints and battles while feeling certain of the benefits of chores for your children in later life.

1. George E. Vaillant; Charles C. McArthur; and Arlie Bock, 2010, "Grant Study of Adult Development, 1938-2000", Harvard Dataverse, V4. doi:10.7910/DVN/48WRX9
2. Albernaz A. Sparing chores spoils children and their future selves, study says. *The Boston Globe*. December 8, 2015. <https://www.bostonglobe.com>.
3. Dr Marty Rossman 'The Healing Mind' video 1.6.20

Additional Reading:

www.verywellfamily.com

www.clickondetroit.com

- Harvard Medical News: Sparing chores spoils children and their future selves, study says.
- Michigan State University Extension: Benefits of Kids Doing Chores.

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