

In Defense of Chores

While scrolling down my timeline I saw [this](#), an article that describes pictures of a six-year-old boy doing chores—cooking, cleaning, you know, normal stuff. But this particular album went viral because the mother created it to teach the young boy a lesson, namely, that chores are “not just for women.” Yes, I know, this heavy-handed message about sexist stereotypes seems obviously silly and unnecessary.

But the message about chores is not. Parents today really do struggle to come up with reasons to make children do something as simple as chores, and evidently shooing in a social lesson is the only way some people can stomach it. In a culture where some people have gone so far as to make children [choose their gender](#), perhaps we value the autonomy of children so much we struggle to come up with reasons that they should do even very simple things, like chores.

Well, allow me to provide some good reasons for doing chores that have nothing to do with imparting politically correct messages to your kids.

The straightforward reason is that a household must be maintained, and chores allow children to be part of that process. Chores provide kids with a sense of ownership and belonging to the greater work of what it takes to be a well-functioning family.

Perhaps I am being presumptive in my assessment that it is harder to justify giving chores to children than it used to be, although it's easy to find many media [stories](#) offering tips and advice on how to get kids to pick up a broom. As well, kids have far less free time today than in earlier generations, as their lives [get taken over](#) by soccer practices, music lessons, test prep classes, and other activities. When is there any time left for chores?

This prompts the question: Is there still a reason to assign chores? If the only point of chores is to impart some sense of responsibility in the child, they could be seen as unnecessary since kids learn responsibility in other areas of their lives. Children have activities to keep track of, along with homework, music practice, and so on.

But all of these activities are focused on the child, and many of these activities can be chosen by the child. The child's autonomy reigns, and along the way her resume builds. By contrast, chores are focused on something other than one's own preferences. Cooking, cleaning, and folding laundry cannot be put on a resume, and (shocker!) they are the kind of activities that aren't guided by the child, but by the parents and the needs of the household.

Of course, there is also the practical value of chores. Sometimes work simply needs to get done, and often there are simply too few hands for that work. Prior to the cultural and economic changes of the last century, children's work was simply necessary for the maintenance of the household. Sometimes it still is.

Today, however, when most children aren't expected to contribute financially to the upkeep of the household, but to prepare for adulthood by immersing themselves in their own education and activities, chores are often one of the first things to disappear from their lives.

But although eliminating chores might free up time for other activities, doing so severely undermines children's sense of belonging to the family and their investment in its maintenance. Better yet, chores work against the excesses of childish autonomy (which in some kids can tilt towards self-involved narcissism) by reminding kids that being part of a family is a communal undertaking, which means their needs will not always come first. Chores offer one of the best reminders not only of their responsibilities, but also their obligations

to people other than themselves. Chores cement children as part of the household and part of the family while giving them skills they will use throughout life. A sensible regiment of chores can do wonders for creating a fuller person.

There are, in fact, social lessons embedded in chores. But they turn out to be far more important ones than the click-bait-creating mother who wants to indoctrinate her son against sexism seems to understand.

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