

THE SELF-ESTEEM CHORES CONNECTION



Is belief in one's capability essential to life success? How can a boy cultivate his competence with a little help from chores? What happens when there are no expectations regarding chores?

In bygone years chores were a necessary part of family life and everyone assumed age-appropriate responsibilities. From youngest to oldest, children took part in caring for the land, animals and family members – whether they felt like it or not.

Chores provided the opportunity to learn new skills and appreciate the value of teamwork. This can be especially important for boys who see themselves as islands – macho and overly independent. Chores teach inter-dependence, that boys are essential to family functioning and that their contributions count.

Today we buy eggs at the store rather than gather them from the chicken coop. Chores do not seem as essential as they once did and many parents proclaim, “It’s easier to do it myself!” When we are tempted to choose peace by removing the responsibility of chores the long-range goal of developing confidence and self-esteem is subverted. Indeed, we can fall into the trap of doing too much for children and unwittingly rob them of important growth experiences – where confidence and character are cultivated. Pampering can be detrimental to growing strong self-esteem.

After all, where else do children get the opportunity to contribute to family life and learn that they make a difference to those around them?

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CAPABLE CONNECTED CONTRIBUTING

HOW DOES SELF-ESTEEM DEVELOP?

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Self-esteem – feeling optimistic about oneself – comes from the lived experience of feeling capable, connected to significant others, and valuing oneself enough to know that you have something worthwhile to offer. A study published in the Journal of Applied Psychology indicates that positive people who believe in themselves have more ambitious goals, so that even when they encounter adversity, they're not as likely to internalize it. Boys who have self-esteem come to believe that: "What happens to me is of my own doing;" "I feel I have a number of good qualities;" and, "When I make plans, I am almost certain to make them work."

Nurturing self-esteem is an inside-out job, not something that can be bought or bestowed. As parents and teachers we create fertile ground for our boys to sow the seeds of self-esteem by including age-appropriate chores in daily life.

While a pampered boy is awakened each morning, has his lunch prepared and his bedroom cleaned for him, might he also be robbed of the opportunity to strengthen his self-esteem muscles and learn the skills essential to survival? Rather than learn about what is expected of him, might he learn more about what to expect of others and become trapped in their servitude? An interesting life paradox is that by eliminating chores to bolster comfort, happiness and reduce stress in the family, we can teach dependence on others for happiness. On the other hand, by facilitating age-appropriate chores we are giving our boys the opportunity to develop the greatest gifts of all – self-esteem and self-respect.

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