

Child Labor

WORK DETAIL

"It's easier for me to do it," is a common reply. Another mother says, "But I feel guilty making them work, that's my job." One area in which our family was weak was the work detail. The children were given jobs here and there, but little trained in a routine. If I were doing it over again, this area would get much more attention. In the early years, the mother will be primarily responsible for this training. When a child is old enough to take a toy out of a box, he is old enough to put it back.

Mother, let your time of interaction always be training. It is natural and fun. Instead of just playing, "I'm going to get-chue," play, "Here's how we put our toys up." "See, I put one up, now you put one up. That's good. You're a smart boy, and you help Mama so much." Keep the chores within the scope of their concentration. Too much will weary them, too little will prevent it from being meaningful.

When they are under five, it takes more time to be their "employer" than to be their servant. But, the best time to establish lifelong habits is before five. By the time they are four or five they should feel not just wanted but needed. My Amish neighbors say that before seven the children are a drain on the family. Between seven and fourteen, they pay their way. After fourteen, they become an asset bringing in profit. By the time a child reaches seven, he should be making your life easier. A house full of seven-year-olds ought to be self-sustaining.

It is essential to the self-image of a child to feel the value of his contribution. Though he may drag in his work, he is happier when his participation is significant. Mother, if you take a little time to train when they are young, you will be able to rest when they are older.

Teach them to clean up all their own messes, and they will make fewer messes. Divide the household chores between them according to their size and ability. A child working below his ability will be bored and discontent. A child challenged will be cheerful. Don't pay or bribe a child into working. Now, an exception should be made where the work is not routine household chores. When an outside job is taken on as income, they can share in the profits in realistic proportion to their work.

The mother should always keep in mind that she is molding a future wife and mother. Challenge them with sewing, cooking, cleaning, learning about everything. Let them get their hands in the dough (unless the child training teacher is coming for dinner). From the time they are big enough to tell a tale, they should be talking about what "Mama and I did today."

Fathers, by the time the boys can follow you around, they should be "helping" you work. My boys were climbing through sawdust and stumbling over briars before they could see over the tops of my boots. They were bringing firewood in when they had to team up and roll it through the door. If you leave your sons for the women to rear, don't be surprised if at sixteen they act more like daughters.

Recently, passing a neighbor's house, we observed an interesting scene. The father was patiently standing over his two boys (one and two years old) instructing them as they folded a tarp. The little one-year-old's wobbly fat legs were held apart by a sagging diaper that obviously needed changing. But he was on his way to being Daddy's man.

When families were part of a larger family unit, or even when the boys were in public school, the absence of a father role model was less significant. Where a working father leaves his boys with a flock of girls to be home schooled by their mother, they often lack masculinity.

Gender role distinction is demeaned in modern education. Don't let a coven of Sodomites and socialists, hiding behind the badge of professional psychologists, reprogram your natural feelings on male and female distinctiveness. A boy needs a man's example if he is expected to grow up to be a man.

WIFE, WOULD YOU SAY A WORD?

One of the most important aspects of child training is letting a child take on real responsibilities. Children need to see that their contribution to the running of the household is vital. Training along these lines eliminates the fighting and fussing over chores when the children get older. Spend a few minutes with each child every day going over different chores step by step. Our younger, seven-year-old daughter needed a job that would require diligence. She was delegated the responsibility of keeping up the main bathroom. She not only keeps it clean, she is also responsible for seeing that it is supplied with all the necessary toiletries.

When the time came for our oldest daughter to go off to Bible College, she called her 9- and 11-year-old sisters in and passed on to them their responsibilities. As I watched her train them in the various chores, which included laundry, cooking and kitchen clean up, I knew I had done something right. It was a change of command, a very sober and thrilling occasion for the younger girls. To the older, departing sister, it was a day of great pride to be able to entrust the younger girls with her responsibilities. Over the next year, I watched as the two younger sisters, with great dignity,

assumed all of their household duties.

Although I am still the Mom, they are my next in command. I have often come home tired from a stressful counseling session to find dinner cooked, the house clean, the clothes washed, and two grinning girls doing a silly bow as I walk through the door. Many a time, after spending a long morning encouraging an overworked, overextended, exhausted mother, when lunch time came, we would hear a cheerful call. The table would be lined with small children already eating, and a good lunch would be set for us moms. An occasion like that does more to persuade a mother than all the teaching I could ever give. For every minute you spend in training your child, you are rewarded a hundred-fold. Living in an Amish community, you see this over and over. Our sons learned several trades before they were fourteen. They could farm, work in construction, log, hunt herbs, and cut hickory. They love working. The discipline in work translates into discipline in studies. And, the real-world experience points out the practicality of a complete education. There is a certain confidence that cannot be obtained other than through seeing the finished product of your own hands.

Recently, there was a death among one of the Amish families in our community. Several of the grown brothers and sisters came back to bury their beloved brother. All of these siblings were raised with the same hard work, careful discipline, and only an eighth-grade Amish education. In the pine wood box, under the apple tree, outside the old church house, lay a farmer who probably never made more than two- or three-thousand-dollars a year.

The five brothers looking on seemed out of place in this primitive setting. One is a neurosurgeon, another is a lawyer, one a city planner, and another, a computer scientist. The fifth one has gone on to be successful in life; he is a happily married Mennonite farmer. If you consider the first four successful, know that it was not early educational opportunities that advantaged them. It was the confidence and ambition that comes from hard work and careful discipline in a family setting.