

The case for children and chores

They aren't just nice things for kids to do.
They are a must for healthy development.

BY KATHERINE REYNOLDS LEWIS

One of my children's most memorable sibling spats revolved around who would claim the privilege of making ham-and-cheese crepes for dinner. The youngest beat the older one to the kitchen and began cutting up ham. After some elbowing, they finally compromised on a division of duties.

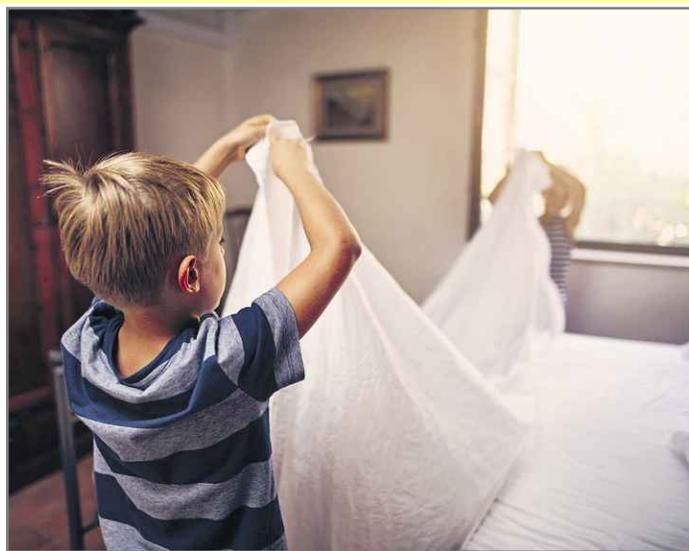
The whole episode tickled me. Don't children usually bicker to get out of chores? I never thought that my kids would fight over cooking dinner.

We live in an era of convenience, with meals available on demand from Seamless and errand-running outsourced by TaskRabbit. And many parents worry more about their children's math facts or soccer skills than whether they can grill an omelet or do laundry. They have a vague idea they'd like their offspring to do chores, but falter when kids resist. When shuttling from Latin class to baseball practice to viola lessons, it's hard to make setting the table a priority.

But social science research

finds that starting children on household chores young boosts their success in education, careers, relationships, staying off drugs and being self-sufficient. This is important, because the youngest generation faces rising rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm and attention challenges. One in two children will develop a mood, behavioral or substance use disorder by 18, according to the National Institutes of Mental Health. It's not just over-diagnosis: The suicide rate doubled among children 10 to 14 and rose 41 percent in older teens between 2006 and 2016, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Chores aren't just a nice thing for kids to do — they're a must for healthy development. Compared with other generations, our children are unemployed. Their days are full of homework, music, sports and extracurricular commitments, but lacking work. Few rely on them to care for a younger sibling, to clean the kitchen or to put food on the table. If you've been jobless, you



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know how demoralizing this can be. It shouldn't surprise us that children without these real-life responsibilities feel increasingly anxious and depressed.

Regular chores feed a sense of competence and accomplishment. Children see the immediate impact of their efforts with chores — and the benefit to others. A just-made bed gives a sense of order to the room. The dog gobbles up the food you put in his bowl. Parents thank you for the delicious omelet.

Parents might need to confront our reluctance to get our hands dirty. Sure, we're happy to Instagram perfectly themed birthday cupcakes, but there's less glamour in scooping dog poop or pulling hair from a shower drain. We assume that we'll need to bribe or strong-arm our kids into doing chores. Is it any wonder our children pick up on this distaste?

It doesn't need to be this way. When parents approach chores with a positive attitude, children

follow. Consider using the term jobs or contributions to avoid the stigma of the word chores.

Begin by asking what skill your child would like to learn: cutting vegetables with a knife, cooking eggs on the stovetop or folding toasty-warm laundry. Kids often gravitate toward something slightly dangerous (knife or stove), so be prepared to train them on safety first.

Accept that their initial performance will be imperfect and slow. As they grow more confident, they'll be open to tips. It's worth the trouble to raise a child who's independent, capable and proud of the impact of her contributions to the family.

When I started looking at household chores as an opportunity to connect with my kids, the mood and rhythm of my day shifted. Now, we chat while sorting laundry. My husband and I thank them for their contribution to the household. We've discovered that chores don't have to be, well, a chore, if we change our mindset.



Katherine Reynolds Lewis is the author of "The Good News About Bad Behavior."

and readers should not be deprived of it because one word in one strip offended some readers. Miller said he intended to remove the remark and has apologized for its publication. To discontinue the cartoon when the president occasionally uses the same vulgarity is to carry political correctness too far.

Virginia and Tom Uhl,
Cutchogue

Arming teachers would be dangerous

A year after 17 students and teachers were gunned down at a high school in Parkland, Florida, a state Senate committee there is considering a measure to arm schoolteachers ["Remembered in silence," News, Feb. 15].

Think about what happened the other night in New York City. The NYPD says a police officer was killed when seven officers fired a total of 42 times

at an attempted robber with a fake gun. These men were trained to engage in situations like this, yet in the heat of the confrontation, as in the fog of war, there were tragic results. Imagine what could happen in a school filled with panicky children if teachers had guns. And the National Rifle Association advocates arming teachers? Think again.

Bill Domjan,
Melville

Trying to figure a way to avoid tuition debt

As a parent of three children with graduate degrees, we have all felt the wrath of the tuition that universities charge ["LI's student debt bind," News, Feb. 10].

I suggest that parents consider sending children to college year-round as part-time students instead of the traditional two-semester, full-time year. In our experience, at some schools, the



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per-credit cost for a part-time student is less than going as a full-time student. If the curriculum allows, students can save on tuition by planning ahead.

If a student plans on going to

graduate school, he or she also should look for a college that offers a five-year undergraduate-graduate combination degree. Some colleges charge undergraduate tuition at the graduate level when a student is on a five-year plan. Some might even offer scholarships that continue into the graduate year. A combination-degree program also can help a student save the time and energy needed to get into graduate school.

Maryanne Farrigan,
Farmingdale

What you failed to mention in your article are the horrific interest rates being charged by financial institutions for student loans. We've found that interest rates start at a fixed rate above 6 percent for a parent with an excellent credit score. Interest can begin accruing the day the loan is accepted. The interest owed can end up being half of the loan. That is disgusting.

There is not enough support

in this country for youth to further their education. Many colleges are very expensive, and students end up owing more than \$100,000.

My daughter graduated as one of the top 10 students in her high school and won several financial awards, but still owes more than \$100,000 in student loans. She was encouraged to attend a reputable college because the job market is so competitive. Young adults should not have to go into such large debt to become productive and successful members of society.

Sheri McConlogue,
Levittown

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