

**# 045 08/28/00 Chores: More about character than work**

There must be an unwritten law that children follow regarding chores: “Do whatever you must to avoid all chores.” I have seen children go to elaborate schemes to avoid chores. They may spend three hours avoiding a fifteen-minute chore. I had a student tell me he was grounded because he got caught hiding dirty clothes under his mattress. He told me that he had even folded them very neatly so that he could get more clothes in there without them being detected. Not only did this little deception take extra time, but he was also short on clean clothes!

So what is it about chores that make our children behave in this manner? You may recall that when your children were small they did chores willingly. They liked the praise for a job well done. Adolescents are less interested in your praise. Their need at this stage is for independence. Their resistance is less about disliking chores than about disliking authority.

Future articles will describe some ways to make the business of family chores easier. First, I would like to address the importance of teaching children to do their chores. There are programs, speeches, books and seminars to teach us how to give our children self-esteem. Self-esteem has been the child-rearing buzzword of the last two decades. My answer to developing self-esteem is far too simple to sell a book or fill a seminar. Pride in a job well done is a powerful self-esteem builder.

A good work ethic is needed to build a nation as well as an individual. Parents who had to work hard all their lives sometimes want to protect their children from hard work. If hard work made our generation have good self-esteem and good character, it is just as vital for the next generation.

If chores have become an issue in your family, begin thinking of the situation from a different perspective. Requiring your children to do chores is more about character than about getting the work done.

