



Families ... generations of strength

Family Life Month Packet 1998
Family & Consumer Sciences
Campbell Hall
1787 Neil Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43210

It's Not My Job! Dividing Household Tasks

Ann L. Fremion, Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences, Erie County

In earlier years women were the nurturer of the family and the home. Husbands worked outside the home or away at other locations. Starting with the 1950s Americans have experienced a steady increase in women working away from the home. A change in the traditional daily routines of women causes a change in caring for the home and the family.

What Does Research Reveal?

Research shows women today do two-thirds of the household chores. Men would have to increase their household labor contribution by 60% to achieve an equality level with women's work.

Husbands with a higher educational level are more willing to share in the tasks. Women's education level seems to have little effect. Does this mean we need to marry a man with a degree? No. It just means that we may socialize some men to view household labor differently than others.

Time spent in caring for children is generally greater if the parent matches the gender of the child. Traditionally boys spend more time with fathers and girls spend more time with their mothers. When children are young, both parents spend more parenting time. As children grow older, their fathers spend less time, but only employed women spend less time with older children.

The strongest single predictor for a husband to share in tasks is the number of hours his wife works. One exception is children-related tasks. Spouses who are close to the same age find that men will contribute more to household tasks. Husbands do a greater share of the household tasks when they are the only parent present in the home. We need more research to detect if the time of day makes a difference for sharing tasks.

Additional research shows that when a woman has a liberal view of the male role, he will share more household tasks. Liberal views include men in meal preparation, parenting, and house-cleaning roles. Could it be women are deterring others from sharing the chores? Women may discourage their spouse and children from helping by criticizing efforts. A compliment and gentle training will be helpful.

One of Life's Little Lessons

It takes time to teach others how to share in household chores. The reward in sharing tasks can far outweigh the teaching time. Families will have more time for activities and special interests. Couples who share household tasks find greater marital satisfaction.

What Is a Spouse/Parent to Do?

Have you tried to get your family involved with household chores? Let them know a clean house, laundry, and

meals are responsibilities to be shared by everyone. Have a family meeting and discuss what each family member can do to share in the household chores. Try these suggestions and add your own.

Suggestions to Divide Household Tasks

- Present a united front. Involve your spouse and other adults before requesting help from children.
- Pick a relaxed time for a family meeting. When all family members are in a good mood, they will be more receptive to requests for help.
- List chores that other family members can complete. Assign jobs to each family member or rotate on a biweekly or monthly basis.
- Make job cards that tell how to complete a cleaning job. Include products needed and where they are in your home.
- Keep a shopping list on the refrigerator so everyone can write down cleaning supplies or grocery items.
- Assemble a cleaning supply tote. Keep the tote in a central location or one on each floor of your home. (Keep all chemicals out of the reach of young children and family pets.)

Change happens slowly. Be patient and give lots of compliments. If you keep doing the work, nobody will see the need to share in the tasks. When everyone shares in the work, your house becomes a family home.

Resources

Ohio State University Extension offers several 4-H family living, equipment, and food projects that would be helpful in teaching household tasks.

References

Barnett, R. & Baruch, G. (1987). Determinants of fathers' participation in family work. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 49, 29-50.

Gottman, J. & Silver, N. (1994). *Why marriages succeed or fail: What you can learn from the breakthrough research to make your marriage last*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Lennon, M. & Rosenfield, S. (1994). Relative fairness and the division of housework: the importance of options. *American Journal of Sociology*, 100, (2), 506-531.

Presser, H. (1994). Employment schedules among dual-earner spouses and the division of household labor by gender. *American Sociological Review*, 59, 348-364.