

Foreword

We were so sick and tired of always feeling like bad parents. The house is a mess; there is a shortage of clean clothes, and there is no time or possible way to catch up. There is always a new video game or DVD or the latest toy or trend that everyone else has, and if they don't, they will feel like outsiders. We felt that there had to be a way to balance between spending too much money and trying to make sure the kids had the things they want in order to have a happier household for everyone.

We have talked to several parents, and they all had the same complaints. "Every time we go to the store, our kids ask for something, we *have* to get it, or else they . . ." Ann has even had strangers offer to buy the children candy because of the scene our wonderful brood was causing. Ah, the joys of being a parent.

The question that we had, How can we get them all to be motivated to do chores and do it fairly so the work is spread evenly? The answer is, we don't—*they* do.

In this book, we are going to look at the challenges of balancing money and sanity. We will also tell you how we overcame these challenges and offer suggestions for how you can do the same.

Challenge 1: Everyone can afford it.

We have tried to give an allowance, and we have tried to pay as we go. This only hurt our pocketbook. It seems that we lost control over our spending, and we lost track of how much we were dishing out. When we reviewed our budget, we were surprised and appalled to learn how much extra we were spending.

Challenge 2: Less stress. The idea of waking up to a messy house and trying to start each day in the middle of chaos is overwhelming. We have so many projects that are half started, never to be finished because the dishes need to be cleaned or the trash taken out. These are simple tasks that are time-consuming enough to take you offtrack. The house will never be cleaned because we are always distracted. Imagine waking up to a swept hallway or dusted windowsills. Little things add up to nirvana.

Challenge 3: Chores to be set by age and ability. Our ten-year-old wanted to mow the lawn. "Riding the lawn mower is so much fun!" he says. We agreed. After about an hour and a half, we looked out into the backyard and saw our own personal English garden maze. It took us twice as long to get the lawn mowed that weekend. This made us realize that having a ten-year-old mow the lawn maybe was not such a good idea.

Challenge 4: Experts and paying for chores. Some experts may disagree about paying children for chores—we are not experts, nor do we claim to be experts. We are merely parents; therefore, we can do whatever we want to "ruin" our own children. (Of course, we are writing this in a tongue-in-cheek spirit.) We are parents, and we want the best for our children. It is an amazing feeling to watch our selfish little monster turn into a beautiful ray of sunshine because he did something for himself.

Challenge 5: When is the proper age to start? "My child is too young to understand that she benefits from being paid for doing her chores, or my child has already been conditioned that he doesn't have to help around the house." These are common reactions from parents that we have spoken with. We believe that at every age, children can help. We have four children ranging from a teenager to a five-month-old. Upon starting this, it felt as if they were all asking for too much too often. We were getting overwhelmed with all the requests.

The five-month-old is a little too young to do chores, little to no motor skills are hampering him. But to watch him watch his older brothers, he can't wait until he gets on the payroll. We do pay him for smiles and giggles but deduct for dirty diapers and crying. So far, he has come out even.

Challenge 6: Dream and dream big. Children have different views about what is essential for living than adults. Unfortunately, many of us adults have outgrown the dream of receiving a pony for our birthday. Children deserve to have these dreams and goals. They deserve to live in a wonderland. They also deserve to be given a chance to earn and work for their dreams.

Challenge 7 "I spent all my money. Can I have \$20 for . . . ?" We got through the first month of the chore system, and as expected, one of the children had burned through everything he earned in a week. We had things showing up at the house that were ordered with the newfound money. Then we were asked shortly after for some additional money because he was going to a county fair with his girlfriend.

These are the types of challenges that we have encountered. You may encounter more or less. You may have different challenges. This book is designed to walk you through the chore system we created and tailor it to your specific needs.

So let's get started! There are some questions in here that require you to realize what you are already paying for, the dreams that you and your children have, and what is appropriate for your situation.



(As you read, we suggest you get a pen and use the note pages starting on page 68 for your personal reflections.)

You will be designing your own chore system to fit the needs of your family. We will show you how we resolved these challenges and how you can adapt this idea to fit your lifestyle.