

From the Heart...

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Housekeeping...Dads & the Dust Mop

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, June 7, 2013)

This is a question for your kids. "Do you ever see your Dad with the dust mop?"

First, here's a YouTube video of an 18 month old doing Dad's housekeeping. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vt1DqvxcpOo>. No, it's not slavery mode. It's just Dad involving his sweet little one, and it looks like the little one is enjoying it. Better to get them doing things like this when they are young. Sooner than later, you will hear your child say, "Oh, no, not interested!" So, keep in mind that involving your kids is a good thing, as long as it's age appropriate, kid-safe, and even a little fun for everyone.

Although today it is much more the norm for Dads to be involved in the upkeep of the house, at least on a part-time, after-work-hours basis, or even more, there are some Dads who are the stay-at-home parent. The US Census reported more than 2 million preschoolers in America primarily cared for by their fathers while Moms work.

I recently came across a 2006 book by David Bowers, "*Dad's Own Housekeeping Book: 137 Bright Ideas*". Bowers is a "Mr. Mom" while the wife works outside the home. In writing his book, he stated "It's a common bone of

contention between husbands and wives—housekeeping. Typically, women do more of it than men, but often times men are expected to step up to the plate and contribute.” Bowers wrote his book to help married couple join more happily together with life’s housekeeping routines. He shares some “real life” pointers for “the guys.”

Here’s his story for you Dads who are struggling to embrace even the slightly “Mr. Mom” image. Bowers shares that he raises “. . . two sons and run[s] a busy household while my wife is a cell-phone-totin’, travelin’, meeting-takin’ office drone. I know how to run a washing machine and a dishwasher, make beds and buy clothes, pay bills, shop for groceries. (I might add that I’m an excellent cook.) And I get it all done with a speed and efficiency that leaves me plenty of time to pick up some work on the side and actually play with my kids.”

Bowers confessed that at first he didn’t see housekeeping as a real job. His wife and he worked full time outside the home. Eventually the wife’s schedule became so hectic that she rarely was at home, let alone do anything around the house. He started out doing the shopping and cooking, with the local Chinese restaurant on “speed dial.” When the kids came along, just “helping out” wasn’t enough. Laundry was in a pile for a week and the bathroom accumulated a heavy layer of slippery soap scum. Housework could no longer be a once in a while routine.

Bowers wife was initially reluctant to give him more housekeeping duties, but she finally gave in and other chores became part of his life. “When I got home, instead of flipping on the TV, maybe I’d throw in a load of wash and start

making dinner. And you know what? It wasn't so bad. At the end of my wife's first maternity leave, we did a quick evaluation of salaries and decided that she should keep working and I would stay home most of the time and look after the house and kid. The more involved I got in running the house, the more pride I began taking in what I was doing. Before I knew it, I was interested in doing things right rather than merely seeing them done so my wife wouldn't complain: "Would you mind not putting in chlorine bleach when you do a load of darks?"

Bowers emphasized that he didn't just wake up one morning and become the wife. He sees it this way. "I may be more on top of things these days, but no matter how many chores I can get through in an afternoon, the fact remains that I'm never going to keep house the way many women would. Neither are you [Dads]."

Men and women are different. The wife may see 20 things that need immediate attention. The man may notice five. And the wife may clean every crack and crevice, where the man may feel a casual once over is enough.

Bower's key to ". . . keeping house Dad's way is to do what's absolutely necessary in the quickest, easiest way possible, and never give a task another thought once it's done." His book, *Dad's Own Housekeeping*, isn't for "perfectionist" Moms or Dads. Yet, it does show Dads how to keep a house that is comfortable, clean, and safe for kids.

Here's are just a few tips to get Dads started. Check out the book to get the total scoop.

1. We like a no-frills approach. We generally don't have the time or inclination for extras. We'll clean the bathroom but won't hang those tiny guest towels or freshen up the potpourri. We just want it to function; we're far less interested in imposing our personality on a room.

2. We're doing it for our kids. Most women have no idea how profoundly today's dads are moved by their children. So much so that we're willing to give up a traditional "manly" image in order to be with our kids, even if that means washing diapers and coaxing crabby little people to nap.

3. We have selective vision. To stay on top of tasks, it's important for us to establish a routine for cleaning (see page 13). Otherwise, as hard as it is for women to believe, no, we really don't see the overflowing garbage can or the pile of dirty towels we keep stepping over.

One last tip for Dads, and even a hint for you single Dudes . . . "When you're a competent man around the house, able to mind children, do laundry, cook, and clean with equal aplomb, well, chicks really dig it, especially your own wife. Who knew that women could be so turned on by a man who's mopping the bathroom floor or talking about what he's making for dinner?"

Just words to wise for you men out there!

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From the Heart...

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By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Housekeeping...Kid Chores

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When it comes to getting your kids to clean their rooms or just pick up their socks and jeans sprawled all over the floor, are you ever so gently submitting a request to your ten year old? If so, it doesn't work most of the time, does it? Often, your tone will more likely be the sergeant of life's boot camp shouting out orders!

We all hope as parents we could somehow find a "sweet spot" somewhere in the middle of "Please" and "Get it done, now!" Sarah Aguirre, an About.com Guide, offers a number of cleaning skills kids should learn and gives some tips on how to make it happen more easily for you and your kids.

In Aguirre's "*10 Cleaning Skills Your Kids Should Learn*" she starts off with doing laundry. "Kids as young as 2 years old can begin to learn about sorting. In fact, young kids often find that sorting items is a game. Older toddlers can learn to help put away clothes. School-aged kids can learn to fold laundry and begin to learn about loading and unloading the washer and dryer with supervision." For older kids they will be mature enough to handle the whole job, even cleaning the dryer. The trick is starting them young.

The next chore is washing dishes. “Washing dishes seems like a never ending chore. Children who are trained properly can be a big help at getting dishes clean. Whether you are teaching your children to use a dishwasher or wash dishes by hand, the best way to start is with scraping and rinsing. Even 5-6 year olds can be taught how to scrape and rinse their plates. 7-8 year olds can help with drying and putting away dishes. By age 9 kids are ready to learn how to wash different types of dishes or load a dishwasher.” Aguirre adds to always teach safety principles, such as setting knives aside instead of dumping them into hot soapy water making them impossible to see.

Making a bed is more of a dying art as well as skill, according to Aguirre’s next chore. “It doesn’t mean your kids will always do it, but at least they’ll know how. Start simply by showing them how to make their own bed when they are toddlers. . . . When my kids were little, they liked the freedom to arrange their pillows and stuffed animals the way they liked. It was incentive for them to make their beds each morning. Parents can make it easier on their kids by choosing less complicated bedding for their children.”

When sweeping a floor, we think it is a simple thing to do, just drag a broom across the floor. Yet, “Give a kid a broom, and you are likely to see dirt flipping everywhere except a pile. Even with all the new gadgets out there, learning to use a broom is a great skill. By age 7-8 kids can begin to learn to sweep floors. Younger kids are even able to hold a dust pan for a partner to sweep into. Older [kids] can also learn to use other gadget sweepers in addition to traditional brooms.”

Now for the next floor chore, mopping. Aguirre feels this job is more suited for older school-aged kids. “By the ages of 9-10 most kids will be old enough to learn to mop without much supervision. Teach kids how to prepare mop water, how to wring out a mop, when to rinse a mop head, what to do with tough spots, how to rinse out a mop and bucket, and how to store a mop. Be sure to give them instructions on how to mop different floor types you may have in your home.”

De-cluttering can be a hard one not only for young kids but also us adults. Yet, this chore “. . . can actually create a habit for them that will carry forward in their lives. Let reluctant kids watch you declutter your own stuff. Share your clutter questions that you ask as you determine what to keep. Some kids may be motivated to donate unused items to less fortunate people. Other kids may be more motivated to sell clutter items in order to save up for something else they really want.”

What other chores do you see for your kids that could train them for life in so many ways? Be sure to check out Aguirre’s article on *How To Convince Kids to Use a Chore Chart* (<http://housekeeping.about.com/od/schedulesandcharts/a/usechorecharts.htm>). You may be thinking right now, “My kids . . . use a chore chart; are you kidding? Never!” Give her tips a try no matter how skeptical you may be. A few samples of her tips are *Let kids help plan the system*, *Tie chores to something*, *Offer a training period*, *Don’t overwhelm children with chores*. and *Make it fun*. All ten tips are worth a read and a try.

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From the Heart. . .

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By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Housekeeping...21st Century Tips, part 1

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, June 21, 2013)

One of the more fascinating resources for housekeeping tips is the Housekeeping Channel. Yes, you heard right! Why you ask? I will first answer you with a couple questions myself.

Do you want to make housekeeping an easier chore?

Do you want to save some money?

Do you want to create a safer and less wasteful housekeeping routine?

If you said yes to these questions, this article series will point you in the right direction. For the balance of this lifeskill for the month, here are some tips from the Housekeeping Channel (www.housekeepingchannel.com) to get you started.

One group decided to test white vinegar to see if it really killed germs and made is an easy more “green” alternative to stronger disinfectants. The Toxic Use Reduction Institute (TURI) and International Executive Housekeeping Association (IEHA) “. . . tested distilled white vinegar (the 5% acidity variety you can find at a grocery store) on a smooth, stainless steel surface and used E. coli and other bacteria to test vinegar’s germ-killing abilities. . . We applied vinegar to the surface and observed contact times of .5, 1, 3, and 5 minutes. What were our overall findings? The bottom line, vinegar does kill germs including bacteria and

viruses. We infer that the acetic acid in vinegar denatures (chemically changes) the proteins and fats that make up these organisms resulting in their death.”

The IEHA offered another tip to reduce water waste. “By taking just 10 minutes to check for household water leaks, you can reduce water consumption by 10,000 gallons. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s WaterSense program, in the span of two television commercial breaks, you could save more than 10,000 gallons of water, which is equivalent to the water used to wash 10 months’ worth of laundry. Finding leaks is easy. To get started, put a few drops of food coloring in the toilet tank to check for silent toilet leaks. Wait 10 minutes before flushing; if color shows up in the bowl, you probably need a new toilet flapper—an easy repair. While you wait, check your other plumbing fixtures for drips—they may seem small, but those drops add up. Next, check your winter water bills. Most families of four use 12,000 gallons of water per month or less in winter. If your bill is showing something higher, you could have a serious leak—inside or out. Finally, step outside and inspect your garden hoses. Are they damaged or cracked from winter’s frost? If you have an in-ground irrigation system, an irrigation professional certified through a WaterSense labeled program can check for leaks and broken sprinkler heads. See www.epa.gov/watersense for more information about Fix a Leak Week and a list of certified irrigation partners in your community.”

See you next week for a few more tips for choosing the right cleaning products without the marketing hype.

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From the Heart. . .

...Life Skills for Today's Family

By Sharon L. Benedict MS



Housekeeping...21st Century Tips, part 2

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When it comes to cleaning and general housekeeping, we all want to make it easier, more efficient, and healthier. So, here are a few more tips on what alternative products you may want to try, courtesy of the online Housekeeping Channel.

The local supermarket may have all kinds of alternative products to consider. Yet, “. . . some of the friendliest cleaners are also right there in your kitchen. You can make most common cleaners at home following these simple recipes.” Borrowed and adapted from *Hannah's Art of Home: How to Manage a Home Around Your Personality*, here are some at home products to try . . .

- **Child-safe all-purpose cleaner:** 1/8 cups baking soda, 2 cups water
- **All-purpose cleaner:** 1/4 tsp liquid dish detergent, 2 cups water
- **Abrasive powder:** baking soda
- **Acidic cleaner** (for soap scum and mineral deposits): 1 part vinegar, 1 part water
- **Germ-killing cleaner:** 1/4 tsp liquid dish detergent, 2 cups water, 1 tbsp tea tree oil
- **Glass Cleaner:** 1/2 cup isopropyl alcohol, 1/2 cup water

- **Furniture Polish:** 1/2 cup vinegar, 1/2 cup mineral oil, 2 tbsp lemon oil (or scent with essential oil). Spray, then buff thoroughly with a dry cloth.

I bet under your kitchen sink and utility area, you have most all these items listed. Give them a try on a small area you are comfortable with testing out, just in case something goes wrong. Then it won't matter very much.

One thing to always keep in mind when shopping for cleaning products is the marketing hype that claims you will have a life-changing experience with their product. Yea! Sure! Let's get real here. How do you get past the hype to get "just the facts Maam?"

Housekeeping Channel offers *A Guide to Choosing Cleaning Products – Seeing Past the Marketing Hype*. "While we all enjoy the sparkle, we want to know if a product is actually cleaning, and, even more important, removing the harmful things we can't see. . . . We also want to know if a product is actually doing the opposite by adding toxic substances, or if it is simply moving the unwanted matter rather than removing it."

With a little research on your part you can decide the best product for your needs and health. This guide helps you determine how effective a product might be, how easy it is to use, its durability, and overall value. Here are excerpts of the key points:

Effectiveness – It will be obvious if a product is not removing visible dirt. However, many cleaning products leave chemical or other residues behind, which can attract dirt and bacteria right back to the spot you cleaned. Therefore, when selecting a product, choose a product that doesn't leave much residue.

How can you tell? Try it out on a clear pane of glass. If it leaves a haze when following manufacturer's directions, it's leaving residue. Does the product kill germs?

Ease of Use – Sure, you can scrub a surface to death and remove a lot of dirt and germs, but what's the point of using a cleaning product if it doesn't make cleaning easier? That's why it's important to consider if a product makes cleaning easier – or more troublesome. For instance, you might consider the ergonomics of a product. Does using a certain cleaning product/tool put extra strain on your body? You might also consider if it reduces the time it takes to clean or if it complicates the cleaning process. A product may be a nifty new piece of technology, but it's not worth it if it makes cleaning more difficult.

Durability – This is especially important when considering major cleaning appliances, such as steamers, vacuums, and carpet cleaners. However, it can still be an inconvenience even if just a simple spray bottle breaks, so durability matters no matter the cleaning tool. If possible, before buying a product, double check for flimsy parts that may be prone to breakage. Will the product stand up to a drop test? (Best to ask the salesperson before leaving the store and don't try this yourself.) Also, look at the manufacturer's warranty to ensure that, if your product does break, it can be repaired or replaced without additional cost.

Value – While we all value a clean, healthy home, most of us don't have the money to spend willy-nilly on cleaning products. One way to save is to use concentrated products that can be diluted for use. Concentrated products will often enable you to clean with less solution, less expense, and with lower

packaging and transportation costs. Concentrated products will often enable you to clean with less solution, less expense, and with lower packaging and transportation costs. Also, buy in bulk or buy products that can be cheaply refilled. . . Lastly, using less product (the least amount that will do the job) will stretch your cleaning dollars, may reduce residues, and will perhaps be easier on you and the environment. One way to use less solution is to not spray it on the surface, but to apply it sparingly and directly to the cloth then wipe.

Cruise through the Housekeeping Channel and check out the full article, for more details on each anti-hype tip,

http://www.housekeepingchannel.com/a_941-

[A Guide to Choosing Cleaning Products andndash%3B Seeing Past the Marketing Hype](#). See you next month for July's lifeskill, *Wellness*. And stay

connected to my *Celebrating Your Journey* blog,

<http://celebratingyourjourney.blogspot.com/>.

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