

#117 - How to Lazy Genius Kid Chores

Hello, friends! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is another highly requested episode, much like last week's on transitioning kids' clothes, and that is kids' chores. We're in our final week of a loose series on transitioning back into school and the fall, so this last episode to help us with that is How to Lazy Genius Kid Chores. Chores seem like a good anchor in the summer but a huge part of routine in the fall, but how do we do it? Allowance or no allowance, charts or no charts, how young is too young or how old is too old? All the things. Today, I'll share how I do chores for my kids but also how you can think about what matters and what doesn't in relation to kids' chores so you can create your own way that makes sense.

First, a quick reminder that you have three more days to give me some feedback on what you'd like to see in the future here at The Lazy Genius Collective. There's a quick survey at thelazygeniuscollective.com/feedback that'll be open until Wednesday August 7th, and one random participant of the survey will get a free Planetbox Rover lunchbox for a kid or for yourself. We've been using our Planetbox lunchboxes for six years now, and they're as good as the day we first got them. They're bento box style lunchboxes that are stainless steel and absolutely amazing. My kids have never had a teacher who didn't ask where we got them and that the lunchboxes are their favorite they've ever seen the classroom. Seriously. Every single teacher. I have three kids and a cumulative 12 years of kids in school, so that's a lot of raving over these lunchboxes. So head to thelazygeniuscollective.com/feedback, take a couple of minutes to give us your feedback, and maybe you'll win a new awesome lunchbox! And if you don't, I'm still super grateful that you'd take the time. The feedback will shape the next year of content, so the more we know, the better it'll be.

Okay, let's talk about kids' chores.

There are three major things to decide, and it's important to decide them in the right order. Those three things in the right order are your priority, the actual chores, and then the system within which they happen. We like to start with systems, with colorful chore charts and wondering if we do allowance or not, but if you don't name the priority and purpose behind your kids doing chores, none of that will work as well as it can. So priority, chores, system. Let's start with priority.

If I were to ask you what's your purpose in having your kids do chores, I could probably safely guess your answer - it's to teach our kids life skills and how to be self-sufficient, right? Hopefully all of our kids will eventually move out, and they need to know how to do their own laundry and wash dishes and all the things. Yes, it's our job as parents to teach our kids this, but it's super important, especially if your kids are younger, to name the priority within that purpose of teaching them life skills. Because here's the thing: if you want your little kids to get practice at

doing chores and being self-sufficient, it's really hard to simultaneously hold a priority of things being done well. The more practice kids have at sweeping, the better they'll probably get, but we cannot hold both self-sufficiency in little kids and also excellence in actually doing the task. If I have my first grader clean the toilet, I'm probably going to have to go back and clean it myself if I want them the whole toilet to be clean. Pick one - self-sufficiency or a job well done. I'm not saying that if your priority is a job well done that you shouldn't have your kids help; you just need to have the expectation that they'll do it but you'll likely also have to do it and not be angry or annoyed at them about it. I'm very guilty of this, so I think it's a good reminder. I can't expect my kid to know how to vacuum the first time his little toddler arms give it a try. Patience patience patience, and leave time to go back after them if a job well done is a priority.

Another offshoot of this idea of priority is how much teaching you actually do during the chore if you're good with the kid going through the motions or figuring it out on their own. Let's take laundry. My boys sort, fold, and put away their own laundry. That's been many years in the making, so don't lose your minds. I showed them once or twice how to fold their shirts, but honestly, I don't really care if it's done super well. I like the fact that they're taking ownership and doing it themselves, even if it's not how I would do the task. So pay attention to how you marry instruction of a chore and how closely you need the kid to hold to that instruction. Maybe doing the task, no matter how they actually choose to do it, is enough. Or maybe it's not. You get to choose. Just remember that if excellence and leaning into a certain method is a high priority for you, check your emotions and responses toward your kid who's just learning and give yourself a lot of extra time to do the chore alongside them.

Okay, so once you know your priority, now it's time to pick the actual chores. If you have the priority of perfection, you should stick with super simple tasks. Give your kids a chance to meet your expectations. Give them easy wins so they don't feel like they can't do something that feels too hard. The list of chore possibilities is enormous, especially with what rooms you have and if you only use cloths to clean as opposed to Clorox wipes. The variables make it tough for me to give you a list of chores, but you can make your own list. And remember to start incredibly small. What things could your kids do in light of your priorities? For example, we don't often have many dishes to handwash because we have a dishwasher and because I only cook meals that use limited dishes. Washing a giant pile of pots and pans isn't my favorite, but we often have a skillet and a knife to clean. As a reminder, my boys are 9 and 7, and my daughter is 3. I do not like cleaning up the messes they leave behind when they do chores, especially things related to water. I don't know what it is, but it makes my skin crawl and my fuse get unnecessarily short. So guess what? My kids don't wash dishes. I haven't taught them that yet. I will when they get a little older and they recognize what happens to water when they splash it hard and they don't actually like getting their clothes wet and making a mess. Until that day, I'll wash the dishes myself. So even though a certain chore is technically age appropriate whatever that means doesn't mean your kid has to do it. Remember your priorities, and then choose the chores that make the most sense for your kids. Just write them out in one big list. If you have kids that are different ages, make a list for each kid.

As an example, here's a quick snapshot of my kids' chore lists. All the kids take their dirty dishes to the kitchen after a meal. That's low hanging fruit to teach responsibility and teamwork. They put their dirty clothes in the hamper. Again, super easy. The boys sort, fold, and put away their clean laundry, and my three year old daughter will help me put the piles of clean laundry away. Sometimes we sort together and sometimes we don't. I'll give her a Clorox wipe to wipe down the bathroom sinks; that's super easy and she does a terrible job, but it's the motions. My boys love cleaning the windows because they like to spray the bottle, so they do that a lot. They'll also clean toilets and wipe down sinks occasionally. They dust with a sock on their hands. They both really like to vacuum but aren't great at sweeping. We'll do a Swiffer sometimes, too. And one favorite way we keep their rooms from completely falling apart is to have them clean up a category. I'll go into their room, locate the biggest culprit whether it's dirty clothes or an emptied out dress-up box or books strewn everywhere, and say "clean up all the books" or "put all the clothes in the hamper." Kids don't always know what to do when you give them a big chore like clean your room or clean the bathroom. But saying "pick up the dress up clothes" or "wipe down the inside of the sink" makes a lot more sense.

Now here's where your system comes in. That's the final step. If you feel overwhelmed by somehow organizing this list and figuring out the rotation and all the things, keep your system incredibly simple. I got this suggestion from a reader that I cannot for the life of me find her name, so if this was your idea, please tell me in a DM on Instagram or something and thank you, but we've been using this method for over six months now and it's fantastic. We call it Daily Sheets. We have a little dry erase board on the fridge divided in half, one side for Sam and one for Ben. I think once school starts back in a couple of weeks we'll give Annie a section, too. But Daily Sheets are essentially a short list of tasks for each kid that changes every day, but I don't have to decide what's on there until that morning. Here are the Daily Sheet rules.

First, I try and limit the tasks on the Daily Sheet to three. It's not overwhelming for the kids to see and for me to come up with. We don't write things like brush your teeth and get dressed because those are naturally part of my kids' rhythms, but every morning while I'm getting my coffee, I write three things in each kids' section on that dry erase board. I can think about the day ahead, what we have going on, how busy we'll be, and decide what makes the most sense. During the school year, one box was always put away all of your school stuff because taking care of their lunchboxes and putting homework folders back in bags is not yet part of their rhythm. Those have to be told over and over again which drives me bonkers. Now that it's part of the Daily Sheet, it gets done. Other things might be wash the living room windows, clean up one category in your room, clean two toilets, pick up all the toys in the front yard, that kind of thing. If the day is super busy or I don't care too much about them doing a lot of chores, I'll make the third one be something silly like "kiss your mother." They crack up and do it and check it off just like if it said sort the laundry. And that reminds me, on days where one legitimate chore is more substantial like sort and fold and put away your laundry which might take a solid hour, I always make the third box something stupid like "kiss your mother" or "do a silly dance" or something easy that makes them laugh or roll their eyes at me. But they're still in the rhythm of seeing three things on their Daily Sheets, and I decide what those things are based on the day.

There are so many chore chart ideas out there, and if something works for you, do it. I just know that if a system ties a specific task to a specific day or there's any kind of rotation to stick with, it won't happen. I can barely do that for my own rhythm of my own chores, so I'm not about to expect that to work for my kids. You might be different. Do what works for you. We've been using Daily Sheets for over six months, and even though they started working immediately, I wanted to make sure they kept working before I told you about them. I swear by this way of doing things. It's fantastic. Oh, and one important part of this. Our kids have screen time every day, but they don't get it unless they finish their Daily Sheets first. That's a helpful motivation for them. And I mentioned this in the episode about managing time in the summer, but on that same dry erase board are their complaining tallies. They get 5 tallies a day, and every time they complain, they lose a tally. There's no argument or negotiation; it's just a physical warning card. If they lose all five tallies, they lose screen time for the day. That'll come into play even more in a minute, so hang on.

Now to the final topic of money. How does money fit into your chores? It depends on your priority. I personally am of the mind that when you're part of a family, you help out. I don't get paid to clean the toilets, so I don't see why my kids should either. At the same time, one of our personal parenting priorities is to teach our kids how to manage their money well. I want them to learn that credit cards aren't magical wells of endless money and that everything has a price even if they aren't the one paying it. How will our kids learn how to manage their money if they don't have any? So during the school year (the summer it didn't really happen and no one cared), we add a component to the Daily Sheets. As a refresher, the dry erase board has a section for each kid with their three chores and five tallies. They only get screen time if they've completed their three chores and still have at least one tally. Also at the top of the dry erase board, each kid gets seven blocks, one for each day of the week. If they finish a day where they did their chores and still have tallies, they color in the box for that day. If they make it to the end of the week and all seven blocks are colored in, they get two dollars. If they do that for all four weeks of the month, they get an extra two dollars for a total of ten bucks for the month for doing all their chores and having a good idea and actually keeping up with the Daily Sheet board which is totally on them. Except for what I write every morning, they manage the board. They know that if they ask for screen time, I will check the board. The board is their responsibility to keep up with. They even erase their own tallies when they complain. So I'd say that ten bucks a month for a kid to take that kind of ownership in participating in the running of the house is super worth it. You could pay whatever you want or not pay at all. Again, this fits well within our priorities, and it works. We'll keep doing it until it doesn't.

And one last thing. Things like taking dishes to the table and doing a family tidy a couple of times a day, those do not count as Daily Sheet tasks. Those are just being a person in this home tasks. The Daily Sheets are more things I'm trying to add into our daily rhythm rather than a validation of what they already do. Hopefully that makes sense.

So to recap, start with your parenting priority. Why are you actually wanting to do chores and keep that in mind as you make decisions. Then think about the actual chores that make sense

for those priorities, and don't decide on a system until you know those two things. Otherwise, the system will likely not work super well because it's putting the cart before the horse. And that is how to Lazy Genius kids' chores! If you have any questions or ideas you want to share, you can do that in a couple of places. You can leave a comment on the show notes of this episode on the website, you can leave a comment on Thursday's Instagram post which will give you details about this week's Instagram live, and you can join me on this week's Instagram live! I'm on Instagram @thelazygenius, and I'll be there live around 12:15pm EST this Thursday to talk about the episode. I hope you can join me there.

Don't forget that you only have a couple more days to enter to win a Planetbox lunchbox by participating in a short survey you can find at thelazygeniuscollective.com/feedback. I'm so excited to learn from what you guys like and don't like and make this next year of content even better for you. Until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week.