



Monthly reports on the problems of children and adolescents growing up.

## Peer Pressure

### Today's youth face pressures from many unprecedented factors, not only peers

By Karen Kittredge, M.S.W., M.Div., and Alice R. McCarthy, Ph.D.

The face of peer pressure is changing for this generation, in keeping with the many other societal changes they must address. Dorothy Cantor, psychologist and former president of the American Psychological Association (APA), says, "Every generation feels like its generation has it the toughest. I think this generation today might be the most challenged since the industrial revolution."

Recent studies support the common sense judgment that adolescents today are facing a different world than even one generation ago. Nicholas Zill, Ph.D., director of the Child and Family Study Area at the prestigious

survey research firm Westat, is co-author of the Child Trends report, *Running in Place: How American*

*Families Are Faring in a Changing Economy and an Individualistic Society*

(www.childtrends.org). In this report, Zill speaks about recent societal changes that may make today's youth more vulnerable to peer influence, targeting four main points:

1. Adult authority is weaker and more fragmented.
2. Young people are spending more time with peers,

(See *Pressures*, page 6)

**Health curriculum writers for the nation's schools need to take heed of today's society that appears to be "pushing the envelope" harder than any previous generation.**

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Ten tips for helping your child learn to solve problems

## Social Skills

### Assigned chores help teach social, personal responsibility

By Rowland P. Barrett, Ph.D.

Chores allow children an early and sustained opportunity to experience responsibility. Independence and self-sufficiency in life are tied, ultimately, to mastery of two types of responsibility: personal responsibility and social responsibility. The process of identifying, accepting and acting to satisfy personal and social responsibility must be learned. Children learn responsibility when their parents accept the responsibility of teaching it to them.

Most parents experience no difficulty in creating opportunities for

the development of personal responsibility in their children. Beginning with toilet training, parents normally assign tasks to their children that allow them to progress toward independence. Washing their own faces, brushing their own teeth, dressing themselves, completing homework and attending school are examples of personal responsibilities normally assigned by parents. For the most part, children have no difficulty acknowledging the existence of personal responsibilities and readily accept them.

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## Chores from page 1

Parents may experience greater difficulty developing opportunities for their children to acquire a sense of social responsibility. In this regard, assigning household chores creates an opportunity for parents to teach children about social responsibilities by employing the most fundamental and easily accessible unit of society, the family.

The assignment of household chores serves several important teaching functions regarding social responsibility. First, the assignment of household chores allows the child to experience a sense of contribution to the family.

Second, a successful contribution allows the child to experience a sense of accomplishment and, in turn, to experience a sense of pride in that accomplishment. Pride is the key ingredient in the development of self-respect which, in turn, serves as the foundation for good mental health and happiness in life. Moreover, the favorable experience of successfully contributing to the family and feeling good about doing so serves to strengthen the child's connection to the family.

Teaching children to accept social responsibilities within their family is the very best way of preparing them to accept and satisfy the numerous social responsibilities that they will encounter outside of the family as they grow older and progress toward independence. For the child who now has grown to be a teenager or young adult, the ability to successfully negotiate social responsibilities outside the family is important for many reasons, including the opportunity to re-experience a sense of contribution, pride, self-respect and a strong, constructive connection to society.

## Requirements should be honored

Unfortunately, chores are boring. After the novelty has worn off, many young children and most teenagers may complain about having to complete their chores. Interestingly, parents who would never think of relaxing the requirement that their children routinely complete personal responsibilities, such as personal hygiene, homework and school attendance, frequently allow these same children to escape household chores.

play in their child's teenage and adult life.

## Chores should not earn money

It is good advice for parents to assign their children appropriate household chores from a very young age. It will not hurt them. In fact, a sense of social responsibility may even save a life if, for example, your teenage son or daughter chooses not to drink and drive. Also, children should not be paid for completing their chores. The purpose of chores is to teach children about their social responsibilities

to their family, and to equip them in the best possible manner to successfully meet the many social responsibilities that will confront them in larger society as teenagers and adults. The value of chores resides in the lessons

learned from accomplishing them — a sense of pride, the development of self-respect, and the experience of being connected to others who depend on you and value your contribution. Payment defeats the purpose.

Rowland P. Barrett, Ph.D., is associate professor of psychiatry at Brown University School of Medicine, and director of the Developmental Disabilities Program at Bradley Hospital.

***It is good advice for parents to assign their children appropriate household chores from a very young age. It will not hurt them.***

It is hard to say why many of today's parents suddenly have loosened their grip on such a readily available and effective teaching tool. Maybe they are unaware of the relationship of chores to the development of social responsibility. Maybe they don't see it as a means of strengthening family ties. Maybe they are unaware of the critical role a sense of social responsibility will

## Obesity program design ...

### Teens say 'don't just sit there, do something!'

Overweight teens want program activities in which participants "don't just sit around and talk," according to researchers who conducted a study of 23 teen focus groups consisting of 203 adolescents. The teenagers were all attending school in St. Paul, Minn. They said they would like activities such as strength training, in-line skating, yoga and hiking. The teens also thought programs should promote healthy lifestyles rather than weight control.

The research, led by Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, Ph.D., M.P.H., R.D., was published in the March/April issue of the *American Journal of Health Promotion*. For more information, call Neumark-Sztainer at (612) 624-0990 or e-mail, [neumark@epi.umn.edu](mailto:neumark@epi.umn.edu)

