

OUTSOURCING PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

An article in this morning's newspaper caught my attention. It was headed, 'Mom, Dad can pay others to do parent tasks.' It said that we can pay other services to teach our kids what were traditionally parenting tasks when we don't have the time to do it ourselves - things such as teaching them to ride a bike, how to handle money, teaching them etiquette, and many more. In some cities you can hire someone to get your child into better sleep patterns, to toilet train your toddler, and even pick head lice out of your child's hair! Goodness me, what is the world coming to?

When you think back to your own childhood, what are some of your fondest memories? Time spent with a parent patiently teaching you how to ride a bike? What a bonding experience that was, when Dad cradled you in his arms after picking you out of the bushes or the gutter numerous times! What about when Mom let you sit on the counter top and showed you how to make a cake. Remember the excitement as you watched through the oven window and watched the cake rise? Better still, the family praise when everyone ate the cake you made and decorated. OK, so these are the fun things that parents like to do with their kids. Some things aren't so much fun, like teaching them family responsibilities. This could be such things as completing chores, teaching them how to be respectful, to be thankful, thoughtful, and so on. Some parents just want to enjoy the fun aspects of parenthood, and want to avoid the confrontational or disciplinary ones. They want to be their child's friend, and not the parent.

Dare I say that many parents have been outsourcing parental responsibility for years? My husband has worked in the school system for at least 30 of his 40 years of working life. He says that much of a teacher's time is taken up training kids in areas that should be the parents' responsibility. Yet parents repeatedly tell him, "It's your job to teach my child good manners, not to bully, and how to clean up their mess, not mine"

There are two issues that I see emerging here. One is that parents are saying that they are too busy to teach their kids what others have more time to do, or are better trained to do. I am in total agreement with Catherine Stogner, an associate professor of child development and family studies at Middle Tennessee State University, when she states that, "If we are too busy with our work and we are not spending time with our children doing quality things – and I don't mean fun things, but making connections and learning life lessons and showing them that we are there for them, then we need to look at what in our jobs we can outsource for more time for home life."

The other issue is that some parents either do not understand their role as a parent or try to push their responsibility onto others – like the classroom teacher, child-care provider, grandparents, Scout leader, a family friend, a neighbor, or the church. When it all boils down, parents are solely responsible for their child's behavior. Their behavior is a reflection of their training. When ducklings hatch, it seems that the first thing they see moving becomes their parent and they follow it. This is instant bonding. When a number of different people have input into a child's development and training, it exposes them to differing values, expectations, and disciplinary measures. They can easily become confused. We all benefit from input from others. However, the core values that come from one source, and that create family identity will give a child focus, a sense of belonging, a feeling of family pride, and the knowledge that they are unconditionally loved. This will hopefully guide them into successful adulthood.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.