

No man will contend that a nation can be free that is not governed by fixed laws. All other government than that of permanent known laws is the government of mere will and pleasure.

--John Adams

Principle Fourteen

ORGANIZATION IN THE HOME SECURES FREEDOM AND JUSTICE

Several years ago, I believed that the simplest way to govern the home was to be casual and spontaneous. I looked suspiciously at others who made a “big deal” of everything-with their charts, lists, and organization. One day I visited one of these overly zealous moms. Looking around the room I noticed colorful chore charts, dish-night lists, book reading lists, and even a treasure box to motivate children through the process. She noticed my interest and began to explain her system.

Upon the ceiling she had arranged a caterpillar for each child--made from egg cartons. A segment of the caterpillar was added for every book the child read, and when the caterpillar was ten segments long, the child was free to pick a toy from the treasure box. As we were talking, her five children began to arrive home from school. They kissed her, checked the chore chart, and proceeded to scurry through the house: vacuuming, dusting, washing windows, feeding the animals. I was impressed, but not converted. After completing the assigned chores, they, one-by-one proceeded to practice the piano or violin--or both! Then they returned to the chore chart, checked the designated boxes--indicating that they had completed their tasks, and were off to play. It all seemed too regimented--too military. I said to my friend, “It seems to work, but is it worth all the effort?”

She responded with enthusiasm, "Worth it? Of course, it's worth it. Do you realize all the hassle that I save me and them by organizing their chores?"

"Maybe," I said, "But there's got to be an easier way." Later that afternoon when our children--all six of them--began arriving home from school, I calmly assigned chores for the day. Donnie howled, "Why me? I always hafta clean the bathroom. Why can't someone else do it for a change?" I listened while he recited past history. It seemed that he had cleaned the bathroom every day for the past ten years--and he was only nine years old.

He continued to whine, "Norman always gets to vacuum; that's the easy job. Signe always gets to sweep the patio. How come you always give her the easy jobs?"

While I listened on and on, Norman interrupted, "I forgot; what was I supposed to do again?"

Our baby, Shiloh, began to crawl up my leg, pleading to be nursed. I was getting more and more exasperated by the minute. I escaped to my bedroom to nurse the baby, hoping that everyone would leave me alone--they didn't. Norman shouted through the door, "What was I supposed to do again?" Signe sobbed, "I was suppose to sweep the patio, but Donnie won't let me!"

"Tell him I said he was supposed to do the downstairs bathroom!" I yelled.

"I did," she responded, "but he didn't listen to me. He never listens to me. Tell him that I'm supposed to do the patio!"

Then I heard Donnie's voice: "I already swept the patio, so Signe has to clean the downstairs bathroom!"

By then I didn't care whether the downstairs bathroom was ever cleaned again. As I sat--frazzled with head spinning--I determined to return to my friend's house to take notes.

I learned for myself that organization is not confining; it is freeing! I constructed chore charts, dish-nights charts, and reading lists. I devised motivational programs with incentives and rewards. In time I could see the difference and came to realize that any organization is better than none. The magic was working! Fairness and written law eliminated most of the complaints and conflicts that I earlier believed

was just a part of the game. My friend was right--one of the kindest things a mother can do for herself and her family is to establish order in the home.

There are numerous benefits to the parent who organizes:

1. It removes the parent from the constant hassles of telling and retelling who is to do what.

2. Verbal requests become more effective when heard less often; children learn to “turn off” to parents who say too much, too often.

3. Written lists and charts, give clout to parental requests; and children, especially in the rule stage, like the official look of written law.

4. Organization secures justice. Children can glance over the list and observe fairness. Children are more cooperative when they believe they are being treated fairly.

5. Written law contributes to a sense of well-being and self-esteem. A child’s self-esteem increases when they see that they are needed and are making contributions to the family cause. In a sense, it’s like a road map, which shows progress to the travelers--where they have been and where they are going.

6. Parents can easily determine whether the child is deserving of special privileges, or restrictions, by looking at the charts. It eliminates the confrontations: “I have done my chores every day. . . It’s not fair. . . I shouldn’t have to. . . I always . . . Why do you always make me. . . .”

In this principle I have emphasized the need for organization and explained how it contributes to the harmony in the home. There are many good books on this subject, for further insight, however, here are some ideas to help you get started on the road to establishing justice in the home.

1. **Clipboards.** One family devised a system in which each child has a clipboard, with three different colors of paper. The first indicates the daily tasks for the child, with squares to check when the chores are completed. The second is titled, “Things I want to bring up at

family council,” with blank lines for the child to list his requests or concerns to be addressed at council. The third is a contract for the child who wants to earn money; the parent fills out the contract, hiring the child for a particular task, and both sign the agreement. Upon completion of the task the parent pays the money earned.

2. **Charts.** Another family keeps a large poster on the family bulletin board: the children’s names are written in a circle, which has a wheel, cut into pie sections, in the center. A chore is written in each section--such as vacuum the stairs, sweep the patio, wash the dishes, watch the baby for an hour, etc. The wheel is turned daily to establish fairness and variety.

3. **Chore Box.** Another idea is a chore box. (I have used letter sorters.) Each child’s name is written in bold letters in a particular section of the box. Chores are written on cards and placed into the compartment with the child’s name. When the chore has been completed, the card is turned over. A parent can easily see progress by glancing at the box. I have drawn pictures or cut out pictures from magazines that relate to the chore--a picture of a dog suggests that the child is to feed the dog. A picture of a vacuum cleaner means to vacuum carpets. A picture of a window means to clean the windows--this idea is particularly suited for young people..

4. **Areas of responsibility.** The idea is to make a map of the home and property, with the child’s name on a particular area for a given length of time. We have a large home with acreage, which is divided up so that each child has a portion of the house to clean, and an area outside to keep raked, mowed, etc. This is a simple way to organize the maintenance of the home and to keep track of progress. Little children are usually Mosaic creatures: they must be told exactly what to do and how to do it. Older children, however, do not need or want to be told every move to make, therefore, areas of responsibility appeal to them.

Note: The greater the initiative on the child's part, the less need for exact instructions. In fact, exactness tends to violate the child's free will, conscience, and motivation. Children who will naturally do more than expected will often do less when given too many instructions.

Other Ideas:

1. **Report system.** Instead of parents having the "monkey on their backs" to remind, check up, etc., the child makes a report to the parents. One mother had her children make a report before they left for school in the morning. There were five things to report: "I am washed, I brushed my teeth and I have straightened my room. My homework is done and I've made my lunch." Then all the mother has to say is, "That's good. Now you're ready to go to school."

This is a great idea for children who constantly forget to do this or that. It keeps them on track. (This is especially suited to elementary children.)

2. **Time or event limits.** No breakfast until rooms are straightened, faces washed and clothes on. No dinner until afternoon chores are completed. This helps children to understand that there is a relationship between helping with the responsibilities of the home and sharing the resources of the home. Children who dawdle their time away do well with this idea. It worked great for one of our sons who would forget from one minute to the next what he was supposed to do.

3. **Established dish-nights.** We have found that our children rarely complain when dish-nights are established. We have tried teams, but conflicts arise. One eighteen-year-old son said, "Mom, I enjoy doing the dishes by myself. It's fun to work while I listen to my music. Then I don't have to wonder if the other guy's doing his part."

4. **Specific times for a specific purpose.** Having a time set aside for a particular task insures that the task will get done. During

homework hours the television remains off. Children retire to their beds an hour before sleep time in order to have time to read. Twenty-minute time-out is when everyone stops what they are doing to get the house back in order.

5. **Team activities.** Energy and enthusiasm are generated when the family gathers together to accomplish a common project. One family enjoys their Saturday morning clean up. The father supervises the cleaning of bedrooms and the yards. Afterwards they enjoy lunch together and fun-time. Children are motivated when everyone is working together and there is an anticipation of food or fun afterwards.

These are just a sample of ideas to establish fairness, justice and incentive in the home. Harmonious homes do not just happen, they are planned. If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.