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## Dilley Discipline: The Chore Ladder

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Parenting six children the same age with all the vast experience of first time parents can be a challenging experience. Often Keith and I scramble to grow up with the issues as the kids grow. Discipline is one of the most critical and difficult aspects of parenting to present itself to us over the past decade. Often we find ourselves growing less gracefully than our children but occasionally we stumble onto a system that works. Currently we have a discipline system that has worked for our family and are actually enjoying this time as we enter the preteen years. Nothing magical, just a hybrid of advice offered by seasoned parents and educators as they guide and support us on days we find ourselves shaking our heads and exhausted.

I am not an expert (as my kids blatantly point out, this discipline quandary is a learning process for all of us.) Some of our peers have asked about our "chore ladder" that was briefly shown on this past installment of Primetime Live in May. I will try to explain them and encourage you to use your creativity to implement something that may be appropriate for your family.

The chore chart and the discipline ladder are two separate entities. The chore chart consists of specific weekly responsibilities that each child is assigned. We found a week is best...they are comfortable and confident with the chore but not too bored with it after a week. We rotate the chores. We have six kids so we have laundry duty, dishwasher detail, a meal helper, a bathroom cleaning apprentice, a pet personal assistant and a tidy supervisor. These chores started out simply, more like an apprentice training and assistant and slowly evolved into more responsibilities as they grew confident over the years. We started the chores at age three.

Some chores are tackled all throughout the day. Not surprisingly in multiple households, laundry is on going, switching and starting loads, folding and putting away. The dishwasher has three meals to wash up as does meal helper with setting and clearing the table. The pet assistant refills bowls and is responsible for the litter box, puts away squeaky toys, etc. (We all share the responsibility of letting the dog and cats out as needed.) The tidy supervisor helps restore things where they go and gently reminds others to stow away belongings and is in charge of recycling. The bathroom helper is a once a day job but because of the nature of it and the nature of the boys bathroom, looked on

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as a harder assignment. (The pre-moistened Lysol/Clorox towelettes work wonders, though.) We do not pay for chores, they are part getting the family out the door each day and gives us more quality time doing the fun things in life together.

At about age 5, we evolved from our ticket system (kids rewarded with a daily drawn ticket promising special one on one time if their name was on the "caught you doing something right" board) into the discipline ladder. Simply, it is a system of privileges assigned to each rung. We have ten levels and use color coded pushpins to designate where each kid is so I can remember and follow through with consistency. Each rung is cumulative and adds more privileges. These rewards can be adapted to age group or made more vague to include multi-aged kids. Perhaps a separate ladder for each age group. It represents something that could be easily adapted within our busy lifestyle and be carried through all facets of the kids' activities.

It gives them a concrete visual where they stand at any moment. They move their own pushpin to take the responsibility for their choices. Incidentally, the school classrooms have a similar system and when we saw it work so well (recess and library time are privileges, not givens, and are earned by keeping all your dots), we adapted something similar at home.

We have the kids (our jury) decide in advance what each infraction will result in how many rungs lost. Those are variable depending on what behaviors we are trying to modify. Today, tattling and taunting can be terrible here this summer and so the kids adjusted those infractions to a 5 rung loss. Refusal to do your chore (this rarely happens, I am happy to report) results is several rungs lost until it is done.

## Dilley Family Ladder Rungs

- 📌 **Rung 1: Chores and thinking time only.**
- 📌 **Rung 2: May read books and practice workbooks,**
- 📌 **Rung 3: Board games, cards and drawing**
- 📌 **Rung 4: action figures, Barbie dolls quietly in room**
- 📌 **Rung 5: Outside play, dilleytown/ Club Dilley, special craft projects**
- 📌 **Rung 6: May enjoy music in room, watch TV (including rental movies with family)**
- 📌 **Rung 7: Computer educational games**
- 📌 **Rung 8: Videos games or Game-boys in van**
- 📌 **Rung 9: May ride bike. Go to the Pool.**
- 📌 **Rung 10: Full privileges including overnight visits and special events.**

Do we find it difficult to decide how far down the ladder they should go for their behaviors? It does really depend on the circumstances and child. They all understand it. Sometimes kids are reacting to teasing and sometimes kids are bored and feel they need to pick on someone. The kid responding by slapping a sibling that is taunting them may go down one or two rungs whereas the kid that just slapped a sibling because he was having a bad day may go down 3 or 4 rungs. If a nasty behavior is becoming a habit with a certain child, we will counsel them and advise them the next time it will result in a 6 rung loss to help them find a different outlet for his or her frustration.

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Do we find ourselves threatening to drop ladder rungs constantly? At the beginning it was a hassle and there was a learning curve for all of us. Soon, it became routine. We finally decided that although we will give a gentle reminder no threats, they just fall, and since it is about attitude that allows the climb up, they usually just nod and refocus.

Sometimes I will use their siblings to reinforce the ladder as I will say "once everyone is or stays at a nine or above today, we'll go out on a long bike ride." "If we can all stay at a 10 in the dentist office, we'll go to the zoo tomorrow." The focus is on building one another up and helping each other, not on tattling and watching them fail. Everyone wins. And it becomes a habit to help out a sibling by letting things roll off instead of reacting to evil grins and pesky habits. This has been especially important with helping Adrian manage his ADHD and his siblings building him up instead of the way ADHD kids are often the scape goats in a family.

How long they are left where they are depends on their attitude re: the discipline. If they talk back or refuse to move their pin or just shrug and walk away, they'll be there a long time to allow some thinking time. They must apologize to the parent who issued discipline and the sibling they wronged if there is one. This is an opportunity to receive forgiveness. They then ask what they can help with to move up the ladder. Sometimes, it is taking over the smacked sibling's chore that day. For example, Adrian was very smart-mouthed this morning, couldn't get into gear and refused to get dressed and make his bed. I asked him twice before he finally did it and then he still came to the table sullen and rude. He is at a six, if his attitude is bright and he tidies the van once he gets his homework done, he'll be up to a ten and can enjoy his baseball game and have full concession privileges. If not, he still plays ball, as he owes that to his team, but will forfeit concessions after the



game (saving the coach's dollar) and after a shower will go to bed for the night. Knowing Adrian, he will have a mitt full of candy and I will have a tidied van. Sometimes it can be as simple as reading a chapter aloud to me of the book they are working on. They practice reading fluency, we both calm down, and spend time together away from the trouble.

The privileges are important to the kids and most days they are at a nine or above. I have had to turn down an overnight slumber party invitation for our son due to his place on the ladder on party night. That spoke volumes to the consequences of our actions and attitude to regain rungs. In our family, it promotes and recognizes good behavior rather than negative. They recognize freedoms and privileges are not just given but earned by respectful and helpful behavior and trust. Consistency and support remain important as any aspect of parenting. Grandma will call up and ask who is high enough to go run errands with her and so there are immediate consequences for the attitudes displayed earlier in the day.

We view it as a family report card. Keith and I do not have a pushpin but the kids will complain and ask to send Daddy down the ladder when he forgets to get home for a baseball game. Some days I know I would find my maternal pushpin on a low rung but with an attitude adjustment and my family's forgiveness would enjoy my climb to full privileges.

