

TIME

Spanish Law Requires Kids To Do Chores. What a Great Idea

Randy Hoder

May 6, 2014

The Spanish measure, dubbed the Child Protection Bill, would extend beyond regulating housework and homework. According to the Madrid newspaper *The Local*, children under 18 in Spain would also have to “respect school rules” and “study as required”

Suddenly I'm thinking of moving to Spain.

A [bill introduced recently in the nation's parliament](#) would require that Spanish children do housework and homework. They would also be required to “participate in family life” and “respect their parents and siblings.”

Wow. Good luck with that.

Back here in the United States, I can barely get my 16-year-old to take out the trash. Sometimes, it feels like Middle East peace talks must be easier. Meanwhile, other parents don't even ask their kids to pitch in—either because they've completely surrendered, have concluded that it's easier to do the job themselves, or have decided that after-school activities and playtime are more valuable. Children have gone “from being our employees to our bosses,” [Jennifer Senior](#) notes in her book *All Joy and No Fun: The Paradox of Modern Parenthood*.

The upshot: Kids ages 6 to 12 now do less than half an hour of housework a day on average, according to [Sandra Hofferth](#), a professor of family science at the University of Maryland.

Some find this alarming. “Parents working to support their kid's leisure instead of everyone working together to support the household is a poor choice,” says Agnes Howard, an assistant professor of history at Gordon College and a mother of three school-age children. “It is good for

[kids to do chores](#) because it helps them develop responsibility and competency and to gain a sense of belonging to a community beyond their autonomous self.”

The Spanish measure, dubbed the Child Protection Bill, would extend beyond regulating housework and homework. According to the Madrid newspaper [The Local](#), children under 18 in Spain would also have to “respect school rules” and “study as required.” And get this: They’d have to “maintain a positive attitude about learning” and “respect their teachers and fellow students” to boot.

The proposed law also aims to keep children safe from sexual predators.

But it is the housework provision, which stipulates that kids perform household chores “in accordance with their age and regardless of gender,” that seems to be generating the most buzz—and, in certain quarters, drawing jeers.

“Are we going to have court cases where parents say that a kid is old enough to take out the trash and the kid’s court-appointed lawyer says, ‘No they are not?’” asks Ilya Shapiro, a senior fellow in constitutional studies at the Cato Institute. “It’s like saying motherhood and apple pie are good. Yes, we want kids to be respectful. But at some point having a national parliament declare that kids should clean their rooms, well, I think they should find better things to do.”

Actually, this is not the first time the Spanish government has weighed in to legislate what is usually considered a family matter. In 2005, the country’s civil ceremony marriage contracts were updated to [require men to pledge to do housework](#) and care for children and elderly relatives. Honestly, who knew the country that [coined the word *machismo*](#) was so *feminista*?

As for the newly proposed housework and homework statute, there is one big caveat: It has no teeth. No penalties are contemplated for breaking it.

Of course, if it passes, I’m pretty sure that parents would keep that tiny detail to themselves. There’s no point, after all, in sharing everything with the kids.