

OVERCOMING CHRONIC LATENESS

August 20, 2009

We see it all the time on homeschool fieldtrips, kids sports practices, and co-op classes. There are a few families who are just consistently late week after week. Everyone who has contact with me knows that I myself struggled with lateness. This condition has plagued most of my adult life. I probably had it modeled to me when growing up which is why for years I considered this condition socially acceptable. But now, as a recovering "Tardy Tina", I believe I have a lot of insight to share on the subject of chronic lateness. I am in no way totally healed of this terrible habit but I am making great strides to improving my Christian witness by simply being on time.

ROOT CAUSES OF LATENESS

After many years of embarrassing and stressful tardiness experiences, I have determined that chronic lateness stems from just a few causes. Below I have listed these causes as well as some common sense remedies to correct them. However, be advised! It takes long term commitment, lifestyle changes and prayer to really implement true change. For this reason, some grace should be given while the "Tardy Tina's" work on their lifelong condition.

#1 YOUR FAMILY IS OVER SCHEDULED

Remedy: Chronic lateness can be corrected by simply cutting back on your commitments. You will never be on time with an overloaded schedule because you are constantly on the go never stopping to rest and regroup before the next event. Not only does this behavior make you late everywhere but you are constantly stressed. To be honest your house is probably a mess and your family eats out way too much. How backed up is your laundry? So change the pace and lessen your outside activities. Your family will thank you. No one wants to be constantly rushed around from event to event.

#2 YOU TRY TO JAM 10 POUNDS OF POTATOES IN A 5 POUND BAG

Remedy: There are only so many hours in a day so you must learn to set realistic achievement goals. If you think something will take you 20 minutes to complete it is better to allow 40 minutes for the activity. Most people underestimate how long something will take so, as a standard, just double your allotted time and don't take on too many outside activities. Too many activities and extra responsibilities will take away from your own homeschool and home management responsibilities.

#3 BE MORE RESPONSIBLE WITH WHAT TIME YOU REALLY HAVE

Remedy: Set a timer when on the computer and phone. Double the time you think it will take you to complete tasks. Develop a realistic time it takes you to get everyone up and ready to leave. It still takes my family 15 minutes to get in the van, so now I just plan for it. If it takes 30 minutes to get to the dentist give yourself 40 minutes to get there. It is ok to have 10 minutes on your hands. Carry a sudoku or crossword book in the car. Have the kids test prep books in the car to work when you are a little early for events. How about math flash cards?

#4 ACCEPT THAT SOME EVENTS SIMPLY WILL NOT WORK IN YOUR SCHEDULE

Remedy: Prioritize!! And just accept that some things can't be done this year because it interferes with other more important activities. Be responsible and just decline to sign up for this event or to manage that program. A good example of this is a toddler's nap time. Unless you are willing to wake the baby up at a certain time every day, regardless of what time he went down, then don't sign up. I recommend scheduling only morning events during the pre-k years. Multiple kids enrolled in conflicting sports activities is another scheduling problem. Consider having your entire family take up one sport or using only one sports complex. Maybe give priority on this to your older children and enroll your younger kids in a once a week program.

#5 OUR FAMILY ISN'T PLACING ENOUGH IMPORTANCE ON THIS EVENT

Remedy: It is your choice to plan to be on time by prepping for activities in your life. Pull out clothes, pack lunches, gather books, and make breakfast muffins all the night before co-op. Prep for your afternoon activities in the morning before breakfast or right after lunch before you hit the school books. This advanced preparation helps you deal with the unexpected events of the day. Instead of letting your kids do school in their pajamas, have them dress every morning BEFORE breakfast so they are ready for whatever the day has in store. More importantly, get everyone to bed at a decent time so you can get up on time (preferable at the same time everyday). Take this opportunity to teach your children responsibility, self management and commitment by simply being on time and prepared for events.

#6 OUR LIFE STYLE IS TOO SPONATENOUS TO BE ON TIME FOR COMMITTED ACTIVITIES

Remedy: Well, just admit it. You have no interest in being a schedule person and the thought of a "routine" makes you cringe. You would rather leave your options open. While there are many benefits to this type of lifestyle, scheduled activities do not fit into this type of environment. So, do everyone a favor and don't register for weekly classes or scheduled activities especially if they have responsibilities attached to them. Remember, others are counting on you. It is inconsiderate to repeatedly shift YOUR responsibilities to someone who is already pulling their weight!

ROAD TO RECOVERY

Those in greatest denial about their chronic lateness condition tend to blame others for their constant tardiness. So, the first step to real recovery is to humble yourself and accept blame for this condition. Stop and realize that you, your kids, and your family are always late for activities and events because of YOU, the time manager of your family! Yes, there are many excuses you can give blaming this child for losing their shoe, or that child for getting up late but the real person is the one who is in charge of day to day life. If you can't get a child out on time, you need to come up with more consequences or incentive for that child. Maybe some natural consequences could be in order like going to co-op in your pajamas or not having breakfast that day. You should provide more follow-up with that child in the morning which means you need to schedule more time to get out the door. Instead of planning for 1 hour to get out the door, make everyone gets up 2 hours early and let them know it is because Billy is taking too long. This type of action will cause everyone to help Billy get up and ready on time.. As the time manager of your family you have to set aside a realistic and organized time frame to get things done and then enforce it. In the beginning it takes longer to train your family to get themselves ready and prepared for activities consistently everyday (This is called a routine for those of you who don't recognize this pattern of behavior). But, in the long run, it will free you up from doing all the work and all the stress associated with a disorganized lifestyle.

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

As my girlfriend Kathy always says "Cowboy up or Shut up". I believe this slogan applies to chronic lateness as well as many other things like diet, exercise, etc. What this slogan means is simply make the commitment to change your behavior, put action behind it OR stop complaining and making excuses to yourself and everyone else. Those reading this article know if they fall into this category of chronic lateness so the responsibility for change is now on YOU!! Commit to work toward making the necessary changes to stop being late and inconsiderate to others. Get an accountability partner to share in your burden. Pray each night for God to be your alarm clock. Ask the kids to get involved and help you with this issue. However, if you chose to ignore and deny this condition, be prepared to accept the consequences of your actions. Late registration fees, missing exciting educational opportunities and stressed out yelling families are all side effects of chronic lateness. In some circles, chronic lateness is cause for permanent dismissal like in places of employment. Ponder this question: **What kind of future work habits are you teaching your children?**

About the Author: Tina Jacobi has been a homeschool mom of 3 for the past 10 years. She also is the founder and group leader to the TLC Homeschoolers based out of Frederick, Md as well as a frequent contributor to HSF!

Visit www.tlchomeschool.com for more information on her homeschool group.