

25 THINGS I WANT MY RANCH KIDS TO KNOW

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1. You have chores, because we love you.

They seem tedious, but they are the building blocks for your future. Responsibility, accountability, and basic life skills begin with sweeping the floor, scrubbing the toilet, and feeding pets and livestock. We love you; we want you to find success in life. Success comes from preparation, so we give you chores.

2. Boredom is a choice.

Don't let me hear you say you are bored. Boredom is a choice, when your backyard is the whole outdoors; there are chores to be done, and books to be read. If you can't entertain yourself with a stick and a bucket full of calf nuts, we're doing something wrong.

3. There is magic in watching the sunrise.

Early mornings are hard; we don't rise as early and as easily as Dad. Do it anyway. The beauty you will witness with the awakening of the world is worth sleepy eyes and cold fingers.

4. A pet is more than a companion.

Your cats, dogs, calves, and ponies are more than friends and playmates. They are lessons in empathy, responsibility, love, and letting go.

5. Grow your own food.

Our world is increasingly rife with poor food choices; the easiest response to unhealthy options is to grow your own food. I don't care if it's a single tomato plant or a garden large enough to feed 10 families, cultivate an appreciation for fresh, whole food.

6. Be open to learning.

In horsemanship and life you will never know it all, never assume that you do. A humble open, attitude towards learning will lead to new skills and experiences.

7. Dress appropriately for the occasion.

A cowboy's uniform, hat, long-sleeved shirt, jeans, and boots, evolved out of necessity. Protect yourself from the sun, wind and weather with the proper clothing. I nag and question your clothing choices, because you are precious to me.

8. There is a time and a place for bad language.

Sometimes you just need to cuss; spew anger and frustration in one grand verbal barrage. Smash your thumb with your shoeing hammer/fencing pliers, massive runback at the gate; ringy heifer won't take her calf? Yes. At the dinner table, the classroom, or in front of your grandmother? No.

9. Feed your help.

Neighbors, friends, or hired men? It doesn't matter; sometimes the best way to show your gratitude for a long day of hard work is a lovingly prepared hot meal and cold drink.

10. Don't judge, but if you do, judge them by their abilities, attitudes, actions not appearances.

Buckaroo or cowboy, flat or taco, slick or rubber? In some circles these comparisons can lead to heated debates, more often than not based strongly in personal opinion, rather than rooted in truth. There is truth outside of the ranching world, as well. Words have power to create divisiveness; do not use them to speak against yourself or gossip about others.

11. Stewardship.

Dad and I choose to be responsible for landscapes and livestock, this lifestyle defines who we are. Sometimes that means ballgames are trumped by pasture rotations and dinnertime is delayed by cesarean sections, it does not mean we love you any less. I hope you approach the world with a sense of respect and connectedness.

12. Fake it till you make it.

You don't have to be confident in everything you do, but taking a deep breath and acting like you are helps you get through it. This can be applied in the arena, the sorting alley, to horses or people, and life as a whole. Stand up straight and look the challenge in the eye, as you gain experience confidence will catch up with you.

13. That said don't mistake arrogance for confidence.

No one likes a swaggering braggart, even if he is a competent swaggering braggart. There is honor in being unheralded, if you enjoy your work.

14. Low-stress is best . . .

. . . for you and for livestock. Don't let it defeat your spirit and energy. Don't let it impact your livestock health.

15. The only dumb question is the unasked question.

Where is the gate? Which calf? Can you help me? Ask questions, no one will think less of you. Clear communication helps prevent misunderstandings.

16. Always do your best.

There are days when your best is better than others, recognize that. Avoid self-judgment, abuse, and regret and enjoy the process.

17. *"There comes a time when you're gonna get bucked and you're gonna need to know what to do so you don't get stepped on."* ~ Betsy Swain, 1875

Do not let fear of pain or disappointment stand in the way of new experiences. What I regret most in my life are opportunities missed out of fear. Pain and disappointment are a part of living, learn to take them in stride and keep moving forward.

18. Be polite and kind.

Enough said.

19. But, don't be a pushover.

Stand up for yourself.

20. Develop a sense of place.

Wherever you may live, learn the names of plants, rocks, and animals, visit old homesteads (or neighborhoods) and educate yourself about Indigenous cultures. In doing so, you gain roots, a sense of belonging that will lend you stability in all that you do.

21. Break a sweat everyday.

Pound a steel post or take a jog, whatever you do, break a sweat daily. Your mind and body will thank you for it.

22. Be present.

If you are mindful of the moment, it is easier to catch a mistake before it happens, redirect a broncy horse before wreck, and have better relationships. It might surprise you, what you observe and what you achieve when you are fully in the moment.

23. Unplug.

Go to cow camp. Leave the computer screen, TV, and cell phones behind. Watch the chipmunks and rock dogs, read a book, or share a conversation with your family.

24. Sometimes the hard decisions are the right ones.

We cannot rationalize suffering and pain to animals. Sometimes the best decision is the hardest one to make, know when to let them go.

25. You do not have to maintain this lifestyle, but please appreciate it.

I don't expect you to grow up and follow in our footsteps; the long hours and low pay aren't for everyone. Carry these early horseback mornings in your heart.