



Tips for Parents: Responsibility

Do your children seem less responsible than you were as a child? If your answer is YES, it may be time to teach them responsibility.

What is responsibility?

According to Webster's dictionary, being *responsible* "implies holding a special duty or trust." Someone who is responsible is dependable, trustworthy, and accountable.

Having responsible children means teaching them so that they become competent and confident to know what's right and then to do what is right.

Are responsible children born?

Absolutely not. Children develop a sense of responsibility through a variety of parent provided experiences.

It's only human that as adults we try to please others. The "pleasing others" behavior pattern actually begins early in life. Parents can start teaching responsibility by letting their children know that responsible behavior pleases them.

Imitating the behavior of parents

Children learn by watching others. If children see adults acting in a certain way, they think the behavior is normal and often behave in the same way.

Children, for example, who grow up watching adults take advantage of other people are likely to imitate the same behavior. A child who grows up watching parents who respect the law is likely to become a person who also respects the law.

How parents can teach responsibility

Help your children learn to do things for themselves. When children have a feeling of independence, they have more confidence to try new things and expand their capabilities. Allow your children to take care of themselves as much as possible. Let them choose which clothes to wear each morning, when to do their homework (within reason), and make other basic decisions about their own lives.

Teach your children to respect others. The best way to teach respect for others is by example. If you respect other people, regardless of who they are or where they come from, your children will follow in your footsteps.

Send the right messages

We send messages about responsibility every day. Here are some tips on the kinds of messages to send:

- **Praise efforts to become responsible.** This is the most important thing you can do. It focuses your child's attention on the right issues.
- **Praise improvement.** This emphasizes that your child is on the right track, providing motivation for responsible behavior in the future.
- **Don't help too much.** If you give your children too much help, they can't take credit for what goes right. They may begin to believe that you don't think they can be responsible.

How can I help my children be motivated in school?

- **Talk about school regularly.** You can't talk too much about how important school is. Not only does talking show your children that school is important, it also gives them a chance to express themselves. Ask what interests them, about problems they may be facing, what they are learning in class, and school-related happenings.
- **Display your children's achievements.** Ask your children to pick two or three of their best school papers each week—such as drawings, math homework, or writing assignments—and post them on the refrigerator, in the bedroom, or in the bathroom. You can make a scrapbook of schoolwork that makes your child feel especially proud. Be sure to look together through the scrapbook so you can both remember these accomplishments.
- **Point out your children's progress.** As your child learns and improves in school, compare recent papers to papers from the past. Show your child that he or she is making progress and has reason to feel proud. It's especially important to keep children encouraged at times when they may be frustrated. Remembering a past success can be a very important motivator for the future.

For more information:

Web link:

The US Department of Education's "Helping Your Child Become a Responsible Citizen":
<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/citizen/citizen.pdf>

Book:

Sharry, John. "Parent Power: Bringing Up Responsible Children and Teenagers." John Wiley & Sons, 2001.

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