

Teaching Children Responsibility

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What does it mean to teach your children responsibility? Every parent has a different answer and a different expectation of when and how their child will assume personal responsibility. One thing is for sure and that is that responsibility must be taught. It is not a natural skill, but it can be learned at any age. You do not become responsible when you are mature, but rather you become mature when you are responsible.

Four variables in this exciting venture;

1. Your child (learning style, age, motor skills, interest, hot buttons or incentives)
2. Your expectations (perfection or ever-learning, do you punish for the truth?)
3. Your example (use the 4 r's, recognize, remorse, restitution and resolve to correct mistakes)
4. Consistency and follow-through (natural and logical consequences)

Outward responsibility deals with everyday things (life skills) chores, brushing teeth, returning videos on time. These are habits that make us productive and reliable.

Inward responsibility deals with attitudes, beliefs and values. This is where we look at the heart. It means admitting mistakes, being unselfish, caring for other people's health, property and feelings.

2-step process:

1. Teach them the skill until it becomes a habit and then eventually it will become automatic action. Automatic action is action without conscious thought or planning. This is the difference between pre-decisions and situational ethics. For example, clearing your plate from the table, brushing your teeth, putting your bike away. You don't have to decide what to do every time.
2. Praise the attitude, performance and effort. Use natural and logical consequences to reinforce the lesson. "Thanks for picking up your toys without being asked. It makes it easier for the whole family to maneuver when we don't have to step over toys on the floor."

You cannot expect a 35-year-old job from a 10-year old. You also cannot expect a 10-year-old job from a 10-year old who isn't clear what is expected of him. We will have to occasionally jump in and help them do an unpleasant task, **but not do it for them.**

Voice and Choice: The more the child has the opportunity of "owning" the decision or problem, the more he/she will learn. The purpose of allowing natural consequences to occur and of designing logical consequences is to encourage children to make responsible choices, not punish them. This method permits a child to choose and then to be accountable for the decision whether it comes out well or not. Most children, when

permitted to make poor choices, learn from the consequences. The most effective method of teaching is for you to remain matter-of-fact and non-punishing. This means separating the deed from the doer. If you were trying to teach your child a new skill, such as piano or tennis, you would probably be patient. You would expect and accept some mistakes. Just regard teaching responsibility the same way. Regard slipups or wrong choices as a learning experience rather than a personal affront on your ability as a parent or teacher and everyone will be happier, more cooperative and responsible.

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