

## **Guidelines for Encouraging the Development of Responsibility in Children**

---

Responsibility is a necessary quality for living successfully in our environment. As parents, we need to see responsibility in children as more than just performing chores around the house or completing homework assignments. On a deeper level, responsibility means being capable of making moral and rational decisions on one's own and becoming responsible for one's ongoing life and ultimate goals. The following guidelines can be effective for helping children develop a strong sense of responsibility.

- Model responsible behavior, strong work ethics, and healthy decision making as a parent.
- Use "self talk." Verbalize your own struggles, efforts, and sense of accomplishment in performing tasks. (Example: "Building this fence is sure more difficult than I thought it was going to be. So far, though, it's looking good and it's solid as a rock. It's sure going to feel good knowing I did it on my own.")
- Gear tasks to the child's developmental level and ability. Set realistic expectations.
- Begin early in giving children responsibility. A four year old is not too young to begin performing simple tasks for self and family.
- Engage children in the decision process regarding responsibilities.
- Don't do for the child what he can do for himself. (Certainly it is all right to assist occasionally.)
- Resist the temptation to "do it over" for children. This undercuts the children's feelings of competence and self-worth.
- Set reasonable time lines for completion of chores or give choices as to when a task is to be done.
- Do not tolerate sloppiness. If a task isn't done to the child's capability, insist that it be done properly.
- Praise and encourage progress and effort, rather than just the end result. Let positive statements outnumber negative statements by at least three to one.

- When teaching a new task, use simple repetition. Demonstrate how the task is to be done, do it with the child a couple of times, and then let the child do it alone. Be specific in explaining and demonstrating how the task is to be performed.
- Rotate or assign a variety of tasks. Children tire easily of repetition. (Give an occasional day off. "You are to make your bed each morning, but you may choose one day a week to have me make it for you.")
- Analyze children's bedrooms or play areas to see if the arrangement is appropriate for easy organization and cleaning simplification. Create a place for everything, such as clothes rods within easy reach; trays or bins for assorted toys; hooks for easy hang ups; dividers in drawers for socks, underwear, or ribbons; bulletin boards; hamper for dirty clothes; etc. It helps to cut back on "inventory."

Understand that the real goals of responsibility--independence, self-esteem, confidence, competence, healthy decision-making skills--are the true underpinnings of emotional health.