



## Responsibility

"Oh, I wish he was more dependable!" How often do you utter those words? Responsibility can mean taking appropriate action without having to be reminded. Your child learns to be responsible gradually with lots of patience and support from you. Help your child begin to be more responsible by practicing a few guidelines.

**Encourage decision making.** The child who is always told what to do does not develop inner standards and controls. Parents are responsible for the child's nutrition, clothing and health habits, but she can still make choices. If she needs new clothes, parents can offer several selections that are acceptable in price and quality, rather than handing the child her new clothes. Inappropriate decisions need to be handled as learning experiences. This will encourage the child in the future. Avoid the "I told you so" attitude.

**Give responsibility.** Teach the child how to do the task. Don't do for the child what she can do for herself. This means teaching her how to perform tasks, encouraging good attitudes and reinforcing her efforts even if they don't quite measure up to adult skills or standards.

**Encourage independence.** Let the child know he can make wise decisions for himself. Here are some statements that foster independence: "It is really up to you," or, "If that is really what you like." Don't forget to allow for mistakes. By overemphasizing errors or by blaming a child for mistakes, parents may train him to give up. Children are no more perfect than adults.

Help your child feel competent by reinforcing, encouraging and appreciating his accomplishments. To be happy and successful in life, your child must come to believe that he is competent.

Teaching children to care for toys and other possessions will help them develop good habits. Encouragement can be provided by organizing the room so everything has a place. Labeling or color coding can help your child remember where things go. Remind him to put things away and explain why toys and other items need to be put back in place. When a child forgets, give a gentle verbal reminder such as, "Oh Mark, you will need to put the puzzle back before you start painting. I will get the paint set out for you while you do that." And during the cleanup time, pitch in and help your child, making comments such as, "I'll get these things here; can you get the blocks over there?" or, "What can I do to help you?" or, "Can you help me here?"

Here are three steps for teaching a child to do a task:

1. Analyze the job and break it down into learning parts. The smaller the task, the easier it is to explain to the child.
2. Teach work methods appropriate to the child's capabilities, and organize equipment and supplies so that the child knows where they are and can get them easily.
3. When the task is completed, give positive feedback immediately. Recognize the child's accomplishments. Reinforce behavior that is close to standards.

Each step is important. For instance, you become frustrated when your order to "Clean your bedroom" goes unheeded. But go back to the first step: break the work down into learnable parts. Exactly what do you mean by "Clean your bedroom?" Have you broken the task down into parts that the child can understand? Do you want things picked up and the bed made, or do you want the drawers tidied or the closet put in order or the room dusted? For children of this age the thinking ability of the command "Clean your room" is so vast that they most likely will not know what you mean until that task is sliced into smaller pieces: put away shoes, make bed, straighten bookcase. A child will then know exactly what to do and will sense accomplishment.

Children are not born with a sense of responsibility. Neither do they acquire it automatically at a certain age. Responsibility is attained slowly over many years. To keep children carrying out their responsibility is attained slowly over many incentives, rewards, positive verbal compliments, love notes, happy-grams certificates, coupons and privileges.

To be a doer is important to a child – and there are many things that he can do. However, every child will experience disappointments and failure from time to time, but failure can be absorbed if there are plenty of experiences with success. This is why it is so necessary to give as much approval and encouragement as possible rather than criticism.

Source: North Dakota State University, NDSU Extension Service