

RAISING RESPONSIBLE KIDS

Train children in the right way,
and when old, they will not stray.
Proverbs 22:6a

No parent sets out to raise an irresponsible kid! But sometimes, something happens along the way that just doesn't produce that responsible, delightful, dependable child all of us has in mind! Parents need to build the vocabulary, teach tasks, support responsibility, catch them being responsible, and affirm, affirm, affirm. It's never too late to begin!

Let's determine what we, in our home, mean by responsibility. I grew up with a common misunderstanding. I believed that "responsible" meant I remembered to do it and did it by myself. Later, I learned from author Elizabeth Crary that responsibility comes in three stages, all of them building and reflecting responsibility:

- Helps with task
- Needs reminding or supervision
- Does the task alone

We need to walk with our child through all three steps, sometimes circling back and repeating a step. Remember, all of them are responsible.

Next, let's clear up a common confusion, the distinction between responsibility and obedience. What is the difference? Obedience comes from an external source, usually the parent, telling the child what to do, supervising, and doling out consequences. Responsibility comes to reside inside the child, even if the parent or another supervising adult is nowhere to be seen. The sense of right and wrong, the decision to do what is right, the follow through all are generated by the child. Of course, the journey to responsibility is a long, and often not a smooth, journey.

What can a parent, grandparent, teacher, or another adult who cares about children do to build and encourage responsibility?

- Model responsibility. Make sure that you demonstrate responsibility in your life. (Keep your promises. Show up on time. Be someone on whom others can depend.)
- Use the words "responsible" and "responsibility" as you catch your child, yourself, and others in actions that reflect responsibility.
- Begin with realistic expectations. Is the task age-appropriate and possible for the child?
- Make sure that the child understands the task. Describe it. Show it. Have the child explain it and show you.
- Ask the child to accept responsibility for the task, describing the consequences for doing it and for not doing it.

- Celebrate all of the times your child demonstrates responsibility. Catch them being responsible. Remember, what gets attention gets repeated.
- Help your child recover from an irresponsible action. Apologize. Make it right. Plan how they will do it differently next time. Accept forgiveness and move on. Give them opportunities to do it again.
- Predict a wonderful, responsible future. Our kids become what we tell them they are.

Together, thank God for being the one on whom we all can depend, the one who is utterly trustworthy.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Have a conversation about responsibility. Use the word. Describe responsible actions. Give your child opportunities to be responsible.
2. Teach your child one task, then help them with it. Next time, remind and supervise. Then, watch for the first time they do it alone, without a reminder or help. Celebrate. "Now that's what I call responsible."
3. Give each child a few, age-appropriate tasks to do daily. Build in a system of reminders. For example, create a chart. For pre-readers, use pictures to show the task. Check the chart daily.
4. When you observe others being responsible - in real life, in a book, on a video - point it out to your child.
5. Let your child overhear you describing him or her as responsible. "Ben is so responsible about feeding the dog, that I don't even have to check Bella's food bowl."