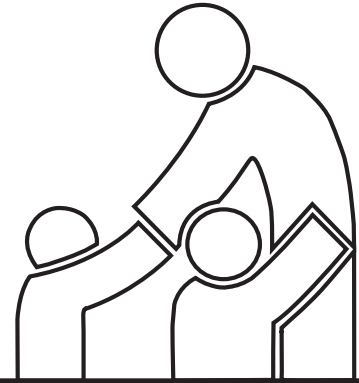


Family Times

NEWSLETTER



A NEWSLETTER FOR ADULTS WITH CHILDREN AGES 5-8

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Developing Responsibility

"You teach character most by what you do, not what you say."

Character Counts – defines responsibility as doing what you are supposed to do, preserving, always doing your best, using self-control, being self-controlled, being self-disciplined, thinking before you act, and being accountable for your choices.

Some food for thought. Have you found yourself wishing that when you woke one morning your children would magically demonstrate adult responsibility like:

- They cleaned their rooms without being asked.
- They decided what to prepare for dinner and fixed it.
- They realized their clothes were dirty and washed, dried, and put them away . . . without being asked or told what to do and how to do it.

Following are a few suggestions that may help you develop a responsible, independent individual. Responsibility is "the child's acceptance of the task and

motivation for finishing the job."

This motivation must be internal on the part of the child. Responsibility involves both personal decisions and motivation.

Children are obedient when they follow the directions of someone, whether they agree or not. There is time in all children's lives to be both obedient and responsible. It is appropriate to follow society's rules. Driving on the right-hand side of the road is a social rule by which we all must abide. However, responsible folks choose what to do and motivate children to get it done.

There are three basic components of responsibility:

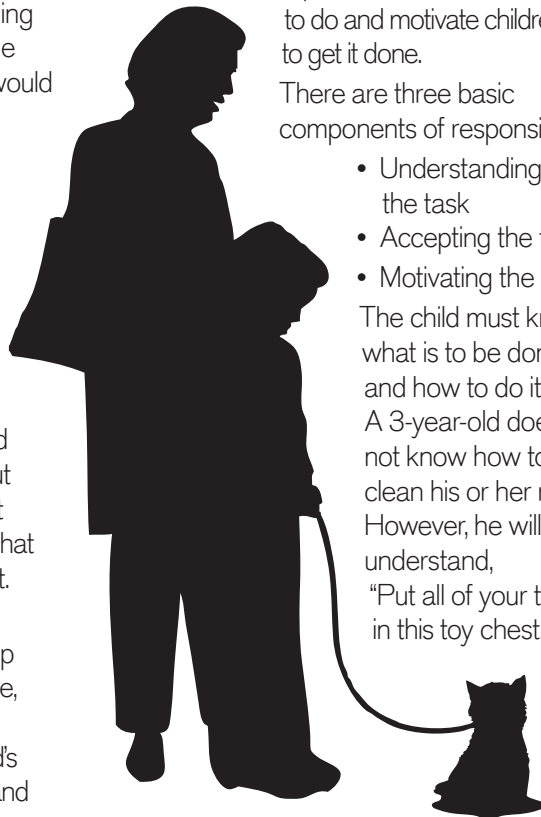
- Understanding the task
- Accepting the task
- Motivating the self

The child must know what is to be done and how to do it. A 3-year-old does not know how to clean his or her room. However, he will understand, "Put all of your toys in this toy chest."

Acceptance of the task shifts the job from obedience to responsibility. As a parent, we must teach the child to see the task at hand and make a decision on her own about doing the task.

Levels of Responsibility

- Helps with the task
- Needs reminding or supervision
- Does the task alone
- Meets parents' expectations



Tips in Developing Responsibility

Help your children feel good about themselves. Make them feel loved and capable.

- Set reasonable limits. Clear rules help children learn value systems.
- Provide opportunities to be responsible.
- Accept responsibility. If parents help children act responsibly and guide the process, children will learn.
- Encourage help from children in setting rules, deciding consequences, and solving problems.
- Help children learn from mistakes.
- Listen respectfully to your children.

In order to complete the task, each child needs help. The first level of learning is to have the child assist you, the parent, with the task. Begin by setting the table together or picking up toys. Example: "I will put the knife here and you put the spoon beside the knife."

At the second level, the child has most of the general information (he knows how to set the table). However, he may forget something or need reminding. Example: "The table is set very nicely. Do you remember where the napkins go?"

The third level of responsibility is independence. The child does the job alone, completely and satisfactorily, and she no longer needs reminding. Example: "I'm delighted you decided to set the table when you got home from school, and everything is in the correct place."



The final levels depend on the parent's willingness to turn over responsibility. Be sure to balance the child's development and age with expectations.

Joint Problem-Solving

Young people can suggest solutions to any situation that causes trouble for their parent or themselves such as household chores, homework, peers, schedules, even fighting with brothers and sisters. Solving problems jointly, as well as encouraging the child to brainstorm solutions, is a good way to teach how to be responsible and how to make decisions.

References

Crary, Elizabeth, *Pick Up Your Socks*, Parenting Press, Inc, Seattle, WA, 1990.

"Sharing Work and Responsibilities," *Balancing Work and Family*, Iowa State University, Ames, IA, November 1994.

"Teaching Responsibility to Preteens, Teens," Iowa State University Extension, December 1993.



The Book Nook

Corduroy

by Don Freeman Jr. is a good book to read with your child.

To Make a Difference – Problem Solving

- State the problem. Describe the views of everyone involved.
- Tell how you, both parent and child, feel about the situation. When people feel they are heard, they are more likely to work on a solution.
- Brainstorm possible solutions. List all the ways to deal with the situation. Do not criticize ideas or point out why some solutions won't work.
- Try a solution. Both you and the child should agree on one solution, being as specific as possible.
- Select a time to check back. You and the child should decide if the solution worked. If not, select another idea.
- Follow through. Unfortunately, the majority of children will not always keep their end of a bargain, even though they may have had good intentions. If reminders don't help, the solution isn't working. Try another idea.

This issue was written by Miriam S. Leatherman, Hardy County WVU Extension Agent. Reviewed in 2007

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