

## October: **RESPONSIBILITY**

**Definition:** Responsibility involves being a dependable and reliable person that is committed to following through on their obligations. Being responsible includes demonstrating a variety of positive character skills such as self control, perseverance, initiative, effort and goal setting. Demonstrating responsibility in all areas of life is an important part of being successful and becoming a person of character.

Thomas Lickona calls responsibility the active side of morality. "It includes taking care of self and others, fulfilling our obligations, contributing to our communities, alleviating suffering, and building a better world."(Lickona).

Key concepts to discuss with your child: DEPENDABILITY, INITIATIVE AND EFFORT

There is a symptomatic behavior of many parents today, who rather than teach personal responsibility, try to either shift the responsibility to others or to try to eliminate negative consequences for their children.

The truth of the matter is that we cannot permanently escape the consequences of our choices, and that parents who want responsible children must teach them responsibility. There is candidly no more important principle that fathers can teach than the principle of personal responsibility.

So, what can a dad do to make sure that his children learn the importance of personal responsibility and to teach them effectively about being responsible?

**Start young.** It is important to begin early teaching the principles of personal responsibility. Avoiding responsibility is easier in the short run, and kids tend to avoid it until they have to respond. You can start as early as 2 years old with some limited and simple chores or family responsibilities, and setting consequences associated with keeping or not keeping commitments.

**Set the example.** The importance of a father walking the talk cannot be overemphasized. If you act irresponsibly by not keeping your commitments, sliding on your personal responsibilities, consistently being late to appointments, or spending money you don't have, it will be hard for the kids to learn the value of responsibility.

**Talk about choice.** So many stories we tell as dads to our children have responsibility as a moral. Even the *Three Little Pigs* is about not taking shortcuts and being responsible. Most fables and stories have a component of responsibility for our choices--that is why there is a "moral" to so many stories. Often Disney movies like *The*

*Little Mermaid* can be used to teach about the consequences of our actions, and *Mulan* is a good example of personal courage mixed with commitment and responsible action. Watch the moves, tell the stories, and help the kids see the implications for them.

**Give them responsibilities and demand accountability.** We started very early in life with chore charts and had a great time using them to help teach our kids the need for responsibility, performance and accountability. Our daughter is now using the same technique with our 3 year old granddaughter, who loves the Disney princesses. Each day that she picks up her toys, puts away clothes, helps set the table and brushes her teeth, she moves a princess from one side the chart to the other. It is amazing what a little short-term reward it can be to move something on a chore chart! As the kids get older, more can be expected of them. Our 16 year old son now has responsibility for mowing, trimming and weeding his elderly uncle's yard. And when the children are not successful, there needs to be consequences.

**Let them suffer consequences.** Unlike the chemistry student's mom, we have tried to let our kids learn early the importance of living with the consequences of their choices. In the classic example, when a baseball gets hit into a neighbor's window, mom and dad should not pay for the window, unless they are reimbursed for the cost or the child earns off the amount spent. Children do make mistakes, but if we bail them out of trouble every time, they will not learn to accept responsibility. And I would certainly prefer to have them learn this concept at six with a toy than at sixteen with a car.

**Focus on service opportunities.** Personal responsibility includes taking responsibility for things about which we are concerned but over which we have little influence. For example, recycling is an important way we reduce our impact on the world in which we live, even though the little bit we do matters little in a global sense. So, if we are responsible, we recycle. Try to find ways to teach children to take responsibility for all of their actions. Service in the community is a good way to "give back," and to reach beyond ourselves.

It only takes a quick look around to see the evidences of our society's tendency to avoid personal responsibility. Make sure that your children are learning to act responsibly and to take personal responsibility for their actions. You will contribute much to their successful future and to the well being of society today and tomorrow.

Taken from:

Parker, Wane. Teaching Children Responsibility.

On [http://fatherhood.about.com/od/succeedingasafather/a/teach\\_responsibility.htm](http://fatherhood.about.com/od/succeedingasafather/a/teach_responsibility.htm)

Wise Skills Resouces. [Wise Words Wisdom for making good choices.](#)

John Heidel and Mation Lyman (1999). [Character Education.](#)