HEALTHY COMMUNITIES HEALTHY YOUTH

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ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

Responsibility: The 4 Keys

FAST FACTS

ASSET #30: Responsibility

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they accept and take personal responsibility.

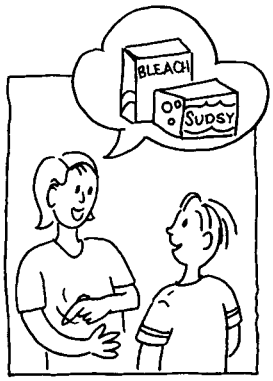
63% of youth surveyed by Search Institute have this asset in their lives.

What Are Assets?

Assets are 40 values, experiences, and qualities that help kids succeed. "Responsibility" is one of six positive-values assets.

** Based on Search Institute surveys of 217,277 6th- to 12th-grade youth throughout the United States during the 1999–2000 school year.*

In *Raising a Responsible Child*, authors Don Dinkmeyer, Ph.D., and Gary D. McKay, Ph.D., point out four keys to instilling the value of responsibility in your child.



Key #1—Let your child do it. Too many parents do tasks for their children, instead of letting their children do them. Why? Some parents think that their children are incapable of accomplishing the task (which is true if they're never given the opportunity to learn). Also, our busy lifestyles often keep us from taking the time to let our children learn and master skills.

Key #2—Expect it to take time. The best time to teach children responsibility is when you're not in a hurry, and you both have no pressures to be elsewhere doing other things. Children will become discouraged, self-conscious, and uncooperative when they sense they are being rushed, or are not living up to a parent's unrealistic expectation.

Key #3—Ask, don't demand. Instill responsibility by invitation. Begin by asking your child to help you with something, such as doing laundry. Do it together. Gradually teach your child so that your child can do it by her- or himself.

Key #4—Use consequences. When your child does not follow through with something that he or she is solely responsible for, stop talking and nagging. Let natural and logical consequences occur. For example, one family said each family member should take responsibility for putting their things away. Anything that wasn't put away would be put in a box in the garage. Children gradually took responsibility for putting things away because they got tired of walking outside to the garage to dig through a box to find their belongings.

Another important way to encourage responsibility is to model it yourself. Follow through on your commitments, especially to your child. When you can't or don't do something you should have, don't make excuses. Talk with your child about how you plan to avoid getting into a similar situation in the future.

time together

Three ways to help your child become more responsible:

1. *When you make a commitment, follow through. If possible, deliver even more than you promise.*
2. *Create a chart of family chores, listing everyone's responsibilities, including yours.*
3. *Don't rescue your child if he or she has done something wrong. Let your child accept responsibility and face the consequences.*

Quick Tip:
Be responsible on a daily basis.

Your Job as Parent

As a parent, give realistic responsibilities to your child. Take time to teach them, and donít nag or rescue them when they ìforget.î Instead, create a home environment that allows children to identify new ways they can succeed in being responsible so that they can try again.

talk together

Questions to discuss with your child:

- *What do you currently take responsibility for? Why?*
- *What happens if you don't follow through on responsibilities?*
- *How can we help you learn new responsibilities without giving you too many?*

Building on Responsibility

Teenagers and young adults donít magically become responsible overnight. It takes time for young people to learn to value and take responsibility. Break down responsibilities and build on them as young people master each step. For example, you probably want your child to take responsibility eventually for the cleanliness of her or his room.

- At age five or six, negotiate a weekly time when you and your child clean up the room together.
- After your child masters that, have a weekly time when family members each clean up their own rooms. Periodically check your child's progress during this time.
- After your child masters that, have family members take responsibility for cleaning up their rooms on a weekly basis without having a set time.
- After your child masters that, ask if family members are ready to take responsibility for keeping their rooms clean without being reminded. If so, do this.

More Help for Parents

Pick Up Your Socks . . . and Other Skills Growing Children Need by Elizabeth Crary discusses the many aspects of responsibility at different age levels. (Published by Simon and Schuster.)

Final Word

ìThe more you let your child do for himself [herself], the more capable he [she] will feel.î
ó Robert Butterworth, Ph.D.

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