

## **TEACHING CHILDREN RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR LEARNING & BEHAVIOR**

### **Ways Parents Can Help Their Children Do Better In School**

#### **The Fourth “R” for School Success is Responsibility**

Every parent knows the importance of the three “Rs:” reading, writing and arithmetic. Some call them the basics of a good education. But there’s a fourth “R” – Responsibility – and it’s also basic to learning.

Well-disciplined students take responsibility for their own learning and behavior at home and at school. They don’t have to be nagged about their homework or attending school, because they are self-motivated and self-directed.

Well-disciplined students don’t make excuses and blame others for their problems. They make good choices about what to do and when to do it. They are conscientious and resourceful, and they don’t quit easily.

But none of this is inborn. Students taking responsibility for their actions is an important step in becoming self-disciplined, and it must be learned. Because parents are a child’s most influential teachers, the very best place for children to learn to take responsibility for their own learning and behavior is right at home.

This booklet is full of ideas to help you nurture your child’s desire and ability to take responsibility for being a good student.

**T**ip: Don’t expect to put all the ideas in this booklet into practice right away. The best way to make changes is one step at a time. Focus on one or two ideas at a time, and don’t forget to celebrate progress!

*NOTE:* Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. But to be fair, we alternate using “he” and “she” throughout this booklet.

## STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY QUIZ

### DO I TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR?

Have your child take this responsibility quiz. Or rate her on the statements yourself. Answer each item with “yes” or “no.”

1. I regularly set goals for things I want to accomplish, and I can list some of them now.
2. I make plans for my time day-by-day and week-by-week, and I set priorities to make sure I get the important things done.
3. I keep track of my school assignments and I have a daily study plan. I can tell you what it is.
4. I have a step-by-step method of studying for tests, and I can tell you what the steps are.
5. I know how to find the main ideas in what I read, and I can tell you how I do it.
6. I have all the “tools” I need when I do my school work – dictionary, pencils, pens, paper, scissors, thesaurus, etc.
7. I make sure I get ready ahead of time. My school work is completed in time to check it over again before turning it in; my clothes are ready for the next day before I go to bed; my school materials are set out ready to go the night before, etc.
8. I spend at least as much time reading for fun as I spend watching TV.
9. I have a regular process that I use to solve problems, and I can tell you what it is.
10. I listen well in class and follow directions carefully.
11. I know that I am responsible for what I do and that I must accept the consequences of my behavior.
12. I know my parents’ expectations for me about such things as school attendance, grades, chores, honesty, use of drugs and alcohol, and I can tell you what they expect about each.

Seven or more yes answers if very good. Five is average. Fewer than three yes answers indicate real improvement is needed. Talk with your child about her score, and then look for ideas in this booklet to improve it.

## **Responsible Students Set Goals for Themselves**

Goals help children focus on what's important and what's not. When children are goal-oriented, they are more likely to say "no" to irresponsible behaviors because they are saying "yes" to their vision of the future.

Children can set goals for school work, getting along with others, sports and leisure activities, or anything else they want to improve.

**PARENTS CAN TEACH GOAL-SETTING...** Take these steps to help your child set goals and achieve them:

1. At the beginning of the week, help your child identify one goal. It might be turning in a book report on time. It may be getting 90 percent correct on a spelling test.
2. Have your child write the goal on a piece of paper. Post it on the refrigerator or bulletin board.
3. Talk about how to accomplish the goal. Help your child break the goal down into small steps. For example, "You could read two chapters every day. Then you can spend a day writing your report and another day revising it."
4. As the week progresses, ask how things are going. If problems come up, talk about possible solutions. If your child falls behind in reading, for example, a 10-minute extension of bedtime might help him catch up.
5. At the end of the week, help your child evaluate how well he did. Did he achieve his goals?" Why, or why not?

*Most important, praise your child for trying. Then set a new goal for next week.*

## **Responsible Students Learn to Plan Their Time**

Responsible people meet their obligations, whether it's turning in school work when it's due or having a report on the boss' desk when it's needed. But it takes planning.

**USE A TIME LOG TO GET A GRIP ON TIME...** One of children's biggest excuses for not doing what they need to do is, "I don't have enough time!"

The fact is they have all the time there is. They just need to learn to use their time wisely. To do that, they need to see where their time goes now.

For one full week, have your child write down what she is doing every 15 minutes. At the end of the week talk about what she has learned about how her time is really being spent.

**HELP CHILDREN SET A DAILY SCHEDULE...** Many children are natural procrastinators. They put things off until the last possible minute, or they don't do them at all. A daily schedule helps a child do what needs to be done, and by a reasonable hour.

**...OR A WEEKLY SCHEDULE...** The daily schedule can also be expanded to a weekly schedule. All that's needed is plain notebook or ruled paper. Make a heading for each day of the week. Then fill in the times and the various activities.

**KEEP A SCHEDULE FOR 21 DAYS AND IT'LL BE A HABIT...** Keeping a daily schedule can become one of the most helpful habits a child can have. Experts say if a child keeps a schedule for just 21 days it will likely become a habit for many years.

## **Students Need a Study Plan and Ways to Track Assignments**

One of the best ways to help children be responsible and keep track of school assignments is to use an assignment book or chart. Students fill them in daily, and parents may review and initial them. Children can make their own assignment sheets too.

HELP YOUR CHILD DEVELOP A STUDY PLAN... Like anything else, children study better if they have a plan. Talk with your child and make plans together about:

- ▶▶ When he should study each day. Studying should be an every day habit. If there is no assignment, he can review.
- ▶▶ How long he should study.
- ▶▶ Where he should study.
- ▶▶ What subjects he should study first, second, third, etc.

A CALENDAR HELPS TRACK LONG-TERM ASSIGNMENTS... Most children have trouble managing homework assignments that require several weeks to complete. Use a calendar to help your child budget his time.

First show him how to break the job down into small steps. Next, help him plan how much time each step will take. Then have him mark the due date for each step on his calendar.

## **Step-by-Step Method Helps Students Study for Tests**

Help your child learn the “secret” of studying for tests is first having a good plan for studying every day, and then doing a self-test review a few days before the exam.

HERE’S HOW TO DO A SELF-TEST REVIEW... After becoming familiar with the subject through daily study; all your child needs to do before a test is a self-test review. Help your child:

- ▶▶ Make up test questions she would ask if she were the teacher.
- ▶▶ Try to answer her own questions to see what she needs to study.
- ▶▶ Review her notes, handouts, textbooks, and learning objectives.
- ▶▶ Relate things she needs to learn to things she already knows. (If she needs to know the capital of Kansas, she might relate that to her aunt who lives in Topeka.)
- ▶▶ Memorize facts and formulas. Help her to make memorizing a game.
- ▶▶ Get a good night’s sleep the night before a test.

## **Students Can Learn to Find Main Ideas When They Read**

Your child is responsible for understanding what he reads. One of the best ways to help your child find the meaning in reading material is to have him consciously look for the main idea. As he reads, he should ask himself”

- ▶▶ What’s the big idea here?
- ▶▶ What is the main idea of this paragraph?
- ▶▶ What is this page about?
- ▶▶ What is the point of this chapter?

Just keeping those questions in mind will help him find the answer. It makes him think about the information. It helps him compare it to what he already knows. The result is a better understanding.

TAKING NOTES HELP... For many kids, just reading the material isn't enough. Note-taking can help students find and remember the main idea of a reading assignment. These ideas can help your child learn to take notes while reading:

1. Write down just the important points. These are often found in the introduction, headings, words in bold face, and the summary.
2. Include key ideas. Jot down the most important details the author gives to support his arguments.
3. Create study flash cards. As your child reads, have him write a question or key word on the front of each card. Then write answer or definition on the back.

EXPLAIN THE MAIN IDEAS TO SOMEONE ELSE... After consciously looking for the "big" ideas" in the reading material and taking notes as he reads. Another good idea is to have your child tell you or someone else what the main ideas were. There's something almost magical about planning to explain the ideas to another person and then doing it. When you've organized the ideas in your own mind well enough to explain them, you understand the ideas better yourself.

### **A Craftsman Can't Work Without the Right Tools**

Just like all workers, students need to be properly equipped to do their job, both at home and at school. Being prepared for class tells the teacher they're responsible and serious about learning.

GIVE YOUR CHILD A SCHOOL WORK SURVIVAL KIT... A school work survival kit contains everything a child needs to make studying and learning easier. The key is to encourage your child to include in her kit information and material important to her. This might be phone numbers of "study buddies," a calendar and weekly schedule, perhaps a list of books teachers have recommended. A typical kit that fits in a backpack might include:

- ▶▶ A plastic pouch for keeping pens, pencils, eraser, calculators and other school supplies.
- ▶▶ A folder with front and back pockets for storing important papers.
- ▶▶ Extra notebook paper.
- ▶▶ Personal telephone directory.
- ▶▶ A small dictionary and thesaurus.
- ▶▶ Assignment planner.

THE TOOLS OF LEARNING CAN MAKE LEARNING FUN... It is worth noting that, for many students, the tools and accessories of learning can actually make learning more fun and effective. Giving your child a few dollars to spend in an office supply store on tools to help her learn can be a good investment. A special pen, ruler, highlighter or note pad may give learning a whole new look.

### **Responsible Students Are Ready Ahead of Time**

Parents can help their children learn that being late or forgetting something doesn't just happen – it is a choice they make. Responsible children learn to make responsible choices.

Children can choose to avoid morning “crazy time” and other crises. Teach your child to take 5-10 minutes before bedtime to get ready for the next day. Get homework papers signed. Pack the backpack. Make lunch. Lay out clothes. Get up early enough to eat a good breakfast.

**CARDBOARD BOX SAVES THE DAY...** A cardboard box big enough to hold everything your child takes to school each day can help children of any age learn to be more responsible. Have each child choose a place for his box. Every afternoon, the first task is to place all belongings in the box. When homework is finished, it goes in the box too. In the morning the box is the last stop before heading out the door.

### **Successful Students Read as Much as They Watch TV**

Research shows that children who spend more than 10 hours a week in front of the television do not read as well as those whose parents set TV limits. These steps will help you encourage your child to spend more time reading.

- ▶▶ Track TV time. Have your child keep track of how much time he spends watching TV. You may help him realize he can afford to spend a lot less time watching TV and more time reading.
- ▶▶ Be a reading role model. Make sure your children see you reading and hear you talking about books.
- ▶▶ Challenge your child for a week to read at least as much as he watches TV.
- ▶▶ Help your child find interesting books. Identify your child's interest, then help him find books and magazine on those topics, and you'll have an avid reader! Your library or bookstore can help your child find materials on any topic.

### **Responsible Students Use a Problem-Solving Process**

It's natural for parents to want to solve children's problems for them. But that won't help your child learn the discipline of responsible decision-making. Here are five useful steps you can teach your child to take when she faces a problem:

1. Decide what the problem is. Summarize it in just a few words.
2. Generate several possible solutions. Ask, “What might be done to solve this problem?” Older children can write their ideas down.
3. Evaluate the solutions. List the positive and negative effects of each possible solution.
4. Decide on a solution. Consider the pros and cons of each solution, and decide which one is best.
5. Develop a plan to make the solution work! Few problems have just one possible solution. The real secret to responsible problem solving is to use the problem-solving process to make the best decision you can, and then make it work!

Help your child consider what should be done first, second, and third. The problem won't be solved until your child puts her plan into action.

## **Listening Well and Following Directions are Key Skills**

Children who don't pay attention in school can't learn. This activity will help your child improve her ability to listen, understand and follow directions more carefully/

PRACTICE "ACTIVE LISTENING" TOGETHER... When children understand the directions they are given, they are better able to follow them. Practice this process at home when giving your child directions:

- ▶ Take turns speaking. Only one person can talk at a time. The first speaker talks about something. The other listens.
- ▶ Focus on the speaker. Look at him. Nod your head, concentrate on what he is saying.
- ▶ Summarize what the speaker just said. When the first speaker is finished, you must summarize what he said *before you can speak!* Say, "You said... (review his main points). Is that right?" The first person must approve your summary before it's your turn to speak.

## **Responsible Students Get Along Well With Others**

Many of children's school problems are social ones. Often, children don't take responsibility for getting along because they don't know how.

Teach your child this three-step process for resolving personal conflicts. When she gets angry at someone else, tell her to say:

1. Why did you do that? Asking someone the reasons for their actions helps open dialogue. It gives room for the other person to say, "I didn't realize..." or "I'm sorry." Or they can explain their motives.
2. When you did that, I felt... This helps a child identify her feelings. It helps the other person see that her actions have impact.
3. I would feel better if... This is a critical step because it requires a child to think in advance about what will help resolve the situation. A conflict is much easier to resolve when at least one of the parties has an idea or two for improvements.

## **Responsibility Also Means Accepting Consequences**

A responsible child understands that his actions have consequences. Parents can help children take responsibility for what they do by not letting children "off the hook."

Don't let your child make excuses for his behavior. Talk about how choices have consequences, and let him "suffer" the consequences of his actions. If he forgets his homework at home, for example, don't offer to drive it to school for him. Say, "I'm sorry, but actions have consequences. You'll have to tell your teacher you left it at home." Also, set consequences at home for inappropriate behavior at school. A child who gets in a fight at school may not be allowed to play with friends that week.

TESTS OF AN EFFECTIVE CONSEQUENCE... To be effective, a consequence should meet three criteria:

1. It is logically related to the misbehavior? Children need to see the connection.
2. Is it enforcement respectful of your child?
3. Is it reasonable to you and your child?

As with all discipline techniques, the consequences must be consistently enforced every time or they accomplish little or nothing.

## **Students Need to Know What Their Parents Expect**

Despite what children sometimes say, they need and want limits. That's why family rules and expectations are so important and only parents can set them up.

TIPS FOR MAKING RULES THAT WORK...While no one but parents can make the rules for home behavior, it is important for children to be involved. Getting children's suggestions helps them feel that their views have been heard and makes it more likely that they will follow the rules.

Talk about specific family rules you would like to make. After getting the children's ideas, parents should decide on the final rules and explain them to children. Write them out on a sheet of paper and put it up for all to see.

TELL CHILDREN YOUR EXPECTATIONS... Children want to please their parents and do their best to live up to their parents' expectations. But, do your children know what your expectations are?

We communicate our expectations to children in many ways – by what we say, how we act, and how we react to others. Think about what you expect of children on subjects like the grades they should be making in school, how much they should be reading, how they should cooperate with teachers. Talk with children about your expectations often.

***A Final Word.*** It may take a lot of effort to get a child on track – to teach her to take responsibility for her learning and behavior. But it will pay off.

Teaching your child such things as how to study, how to organize time, how to solve problems and how to get along with others can help her become more responsible.

As your child becomes a self-confident, independent learner, you will have met one of your most important responsibilities. You will have taught your child the attitudes and skills she needs to grow into a responsible and capable adult.

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