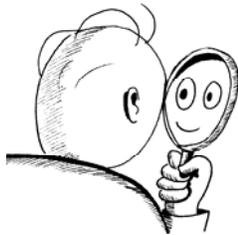


TEACHING CHILDREN RESPONSIBILITY AND INDEPENDENCE



Children start the drive toward independence at an early age. Some parents, accustomed to meeting all of their children's needs, are reluctant to give in to their children's demands for independence. However, this is the time for parents to find the balance between letting their children begin to do things for themselves and providing their children with the support and guidance they need.

With this increasing independence comes the ability for children to understand the concept of responsibility. This is an excellent time for parents to begin teaching responsibility to their children.

Here are some things parents can do to foster responsibility and independence in their children.

***Let your children do things for themselves.** Even very young children begin to show an interest in doing things for themselves. Parents can encourage independence by letting their children do things for themselves as soon as they express a desire to do so. Parents should focus on effort and avoid being critical of the end product. Parents should praise children for doing things on their own. As children grow and mature, they will naturally want to do more and more for themselves.

***Let your children help with challenging tasks.** Parents should encourage their children to try to do new things and to face new challenges. This will certainly boost children's sense of competence. Parents should be careful to choose tasks that their children are able to accomplish.

***Encourage your children to make decisions.** Parents should start encouraging decision-making while their children are young. At first, choices should be kept simple, like allowing children to choose what to wear out of two outfits. As children get older, parents should encourage

them to make more and more complex decisions. Children learn to make good choices by being given choices.

***Learn to model responsibility and independence.** Children learn by watching their parents. One of the best ways for parents to teach their children to behave responsibly and independently is by displaying those behaviors themselves. Parents should let their children see them making decisions without wavering. Parents should let their children see them taking care of responsibilities in an appropriate manner.

***Help and encourage your children to solve their own problems.** Problem-solving is a skill that must be learned. Starting when children are young, parents should teach their children problem-solving strategies. Parents should then encourage their children to come up with their own solutions to their problems. The ability to problem-solve is a skill that will be useful throughout children's lives. It will also aid in the development of confidence and independence.

***Encourage your children to take risks.** Taking risks involves facing potential failure. Many parents try to shield their children from the disappointment of failure. Such

parents may be doing their children a disservice. Children need to take risks to grow. Children must experience failure in order to learn how to cope with it.

***Be there to provide support, when needed.** Even the most independent-minded children need to lean on their parents from time to time. Parents should make an effort to be available to their children and to provide support when needed. Children who know their parents will be there when they need them will have the confidence needed to explore the world.

***Provide adequate discipline.** Children need structure in their lives to feel secure. Appropriate discipline provides this structure. Children need to know what to expect from their parents and what their parents expect from them. Consistent discipline helps children learn about what's expected of them. Children who know what to expect feel more in control of their lives and are thus more likely to behave in responsible and independent ways.

***Praise your children.** Parents should provide their children with lots of praise when they display responsible and independent behavior. Parents who praise such behavior are

letting their children know that they notice and appreciate their efforts.

***Give your children responsibilities.**

Most children want to help their parents and to feel needed. One of the best ways for children to learn how to behave responsibly is to be given responsibilities. Parents can give their children responsibilities in the form of chores. Parents should make sure that the chores assigned to their children match their capabilities. Parents should also take the time to show their children how to do their assigned tasks the correct way. Parents should keep in mind, though, that how well their children perform a task is not as important as what their children are learning about responsibility.



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