

-PARENTING FOR RESPONSIBILITY

A responsible person is defined as one who understands that there are consequences for behavior and therefore plans ahead so that the consequences will be pleasant rather than unpleasant. To be responsible means that one has to do something or behave in a particular way. To judge responsibility therefore requires one to evaluate behavior. To teach responsibility requires a parent to reward a child for accomplished and completed behavior rather than for expected behavior or talk about future plans.

In this model, after a behavior is repeatedly demonstrated a reward is given. For example, if a child repeatedly demonstrates he or she can care for oneself then the child is given the freedom to spend the night out. The more rewards given, the more freedom the child has. And that's what most kids want. It is important to note that in this model the name for what is given is a reward not a privilege. Rewards are things that are earned. Privileges are given before the fact.

The goal for parenting in this model is for the child to learn that their own behavior controls their life. Continuous responsible behavior brings positive rewards and freedom. Continued irresponsible behavior results in rewards not being given in the first place and may result in their loss, temporarily, when mistakes are made. In this model earning something is seen as a normal and natural part of life. One gets according to how one performs.

Parents who use this model of parenting believe:

- 1) Parents do not have to ensure that their children are happy all of the time.
- 2) If natural consequences occur as the result of a child being irresponsible, such as missing an important event or being embarrassed in front of friends, it's okay.
- 3) It is important to communicate with their children by reading their behavior rather than only listening to their words.

4) Children are learning and will make mistakes, therefore rewards are given only after repeated consistent behavior rather than after one good deed.

In this parenting model a child learns that they don't automatically get things just because they exist. As a result, the child can respect and appreciate others efforts because they have a personal understanding of what it means to earn something. In addition they develop a personal sense of power (empowerment) and self esteem because they know that their control of their own behavior will and can determine what they get in life.

Because learning to be entitled or responsible both require rewards, one for being and the other for behavior, they are both learned over time. Therefore, to unlearn either model will also take time. If you experience your child being consistently disrespectful of you, thwarting your efforts at parenting, and find yourself feeling helpless or incompetent as a parent, your child is too entitled. To change this you will have to change your beliefs as a parent, start rewarding your child only after consistent, demonstrated positive behavior, and be willing to have your child be unhappy sometimes. An entitled child can be quite a formidable force and will fight hard to maintain the status quo. The older the child, the harder the struggle because there is a longer history of entitlements to overcome. Parenting groups, a therapist, or sometimes even a supportive, understanding friend or family member can be an invaluable support system for parents trying to change parenting models.

The bottom line is that we all learn from our experiences. If your child is not learning what you want him or her to learn, change what they experience.

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Age Appropriate Chores/Tasks for Toddlers

1. Turn off lights when he/she leaves her room (this may require that a step stool be temporarily put in place).
2. Hang up towel after a bath. (Use a hook rather than a bar to make this easier.)
3. Put toys away when finished. (Provide plenty of bins and easy to access storage.)
4. Say thank you to teachers, doctors, babysitters, waiters, even the mailman every time you encounter them.
5. Carry dishes to counter after eating. (Take it one step further and have your child put his/her utensils in the dishwasher.)
6. When a spill occurs, instead of swooping in, hand your child a towel and help him wipe up his/her own mess.

Age Appropriate Chores/Tasks for Preschoolers

1. Set the table.
2. Wipe out sink after brushing teeth.
3. Turn off all the lights in house when family is leaving the house.
4. Feed a pet.
5. Tidy up his/her room.
6. Dust a room.
7. Open and hold the door for others.

Age Appropriate Chores/Tasks for Kids Age 6-11

1. Wash windows and mirrors (use vinegar diluted in water for safety).
2. Carry clothing to laundry room and sort. Put away clothing after it is clean.
3. Answer the phone politely and take a message.
4. Load dishwasher.
5. Walk the dog and/or clean out the litter box.
6. Vacuum a room.
7. Organize his/her closet.
8. Help make dinner (older kids can graduate to doing this on their own).
9. Pack own lunch and make own breakfast
10. Accompany parent into the voting booth to observe the process.
11. Help purchase/create thank you gifts for teachers, babysitter, etc.
12. Do something nice for someone who is experiencing sickness or loss.
13. Clean out the back seat of car.
14. Be responsible for homework.
15. Use phone to call grandparents, friends, etc.
16. Order for herself/himself at restaurants.
17. Have own library card and be responsible for late fees.
18. When a need arises while shopping, ask an employee for help.

Age Appropriate Chores/Tasks for Kids Ages 12+

1. Devise a schedule and test smoke detectors four times a year
2. Organize a thank you gift for a coach, teacher, etc.
3. Paint bedroom and rearrange furniture.
4. Plant own garden. (Even if it's only a pot or window box!)
5. Create invitations/plan a party.
6. Plan and make dinner once a month (or once a week!).
7. Choose a charity and designate a portion of allowance to that charity.
8. Mop a floor.
9. When unhappy with a product or service, register a complaint.
10. Create a "Day in the Life" video of your family. (Makes a great holiday gift!)
11. Sew on a button.
12. Write a real letter to a relative or elected official.
13. Figure out the correct tip when eating out.
14. Create a budget for holiday shopping.
15. Wash the car and fill the tank with gas.
16. Order a home-delivered meal and pay (and tip) the delivery person.
17. Volunteer at a soup kitchen or food bank.
18. Clean the toilet each week.
19. When light bulb burns out, replace.

Some of these challenges may seem like too much for your children. Challenge them to master these tasks, anyway.

I am quite certain they will surprise you and maybe even themselves.

The 2-Minute Action Plan for Fine Parents

Pull out a sheet of paper or start a new note on your phone. List the abilities and qualities you hope your children will have by the time they are eighteen. Back track from that point and begin thinking of chores and responsibilities you can give your children now which will help them attain those abilities and qualities before they leave home. Instead of thinking in terms of what they can't do, begin to see them as the capable human beings they are and discover what they can do.

The Ongoing Action Plan for Fine Parents

Be intentional about promoting your children's independence. Look for teachable moments. When the food arrives and there's unwanted mayonnaise on your son's cheeseburger, let him explain the problem to the waiter (or eat the burger as is!). If your daughter is unhappy about a grade or an assignment, let her talk to the teacher about it before you become involved. Learning to speak up for yourself is a critical life skill. Children can begin learning this skill as soon as they can talk.

A sense of gratitude is directly related to happiness. Intentionally cultivate gratitude by commenting frequently on your own and your child's blessings. Model saying thank you and giving thank you gifts. Instead of writing the end-of-year thank you note, have your child do it. If he is too young, have him dictate to you what to say in a note to accompany a picture he has drawn.

Think through the responsibilities your children have in your home now. Is your 11-year-old still doing the same jobs she had when she was eight? Determine if your children are capable of doing more and set the bar high.

Talk to them about why they are being given new responsibilities- *They are important contributors to your home. They are more mature now. They need these skills for the day when they have their own homes.* Help them see beyond the grind of clearing their dishes or hanging up their towels and relate it to the future when they have roommates, bosses, even children of their own.

When a household problem occurs – a toilet overflowing, a broken glass vase, the cable is out, the food processor blows the circuit – involve your children in the solution. Maybe they're too young to handle broken glass, but you can talk to them about the importance of finding every shard so that no one gets hurt and teach them the trick of shining a flashlight on the surface to spot fragments you might have missed. Show them where the circuit breaker box is and how you can tell if a circuit has flipped. Allow them to be part of the solution.

Here's the bottom line for all of us fine parents: **If we are intentional in our parenting, our kids have a better shot at growing up confident in their own ability to take care of themselves. Isn't that what we really want for them?**