

Promoting Social and Emotional Learning at Home

This Week's Focus – Personal Responsibility

What is Personal Responsibility?

Nearly 30 years ago, the United States Department of Labor released a landmark study, The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills Report that defined the skills necessary for successful employment. One of the twelve Foundational Skills they identified was Responsibility. To be successful in life as well as the workplace, our children need a strong sense of Personal Responsibility, which we define as, "an individual's tendency to be careful and reliable in their actions." We all want our children to achieve great things and as Winston Churchill said, "the price of greatness is responsibility." Here are some suggestions to help your child build this critical skill set:

Elementary Students – Encourage Before You Correct - Parents are busy people. With all of our responsibilities, it is tempting to just go ahead and correct our children's schoolwork rather than taking the time to encourage them to persevere, try again, and find the right answer on their own or at least with minimal guidance from us. But think of the long-term consequences of this correct first approach. Likely all of us has known a co-worker who did shoddy work and relied on others (like us!) to review and correct their work. These individuals may lack Personal Responsibility and take advantage of others. That certainly isn't who we want our children to become.

So rather than correcting their work, encourage your children to keep trying. Be positive and supportive. If your child becomes frustrated, give them some gentle guidance, but don't solve the problem for them. Encourage before you correct. They will feel proud and more confident if they learn how to solve it themselves.

Middle School Students – What Am I Good At?¹ - A key aspect of Personal Responsibility is perseverance – continuing to work hard and try one's best until we complete a task or solve a problem. We can encourage perseverance in our children by helping them identify what strategies or techniques have helped them persevere and be successful in the past and can be applied to the current situation. One way to help them do this is for each of you to identify some important responsibility that you are good at. For the parent it might be grocery shopping or paying bills on time. For the student it might be doing chores without reminders or participating in an extra-curricular activity at school. Then each of you should write down at least three strategies (for example, keeping an up-to-date calendar, or setting reminders on your smart phone) that help you succeed in this area. Discuss your strategies, keep a list of them, and the next time your child (or you) is struggling to complete a project or task, review the list and see what proven strategies you can apply to the current challenge.

High School Students – Encourage Reporting Mistakes - Researchers Martin Landau and Donald Chisholm tell the story of a seaman on the US Navy's aircraft carrier the Carl Vinson who lost a tool somewhere on the flight deck. Knowing that the tool could cause a serious accident if a jet sucked it

¹First developed by Ann McKay Bryson as part of Aperture Education's DESSA Comprehensive System



into its engine on takeoff or landing, the seaman immediately reported his mistake. All take-offs were cancelled, and all landings were diverted until the tool was found. Not only was the seaman not reprimanded for losing his tool, but he was commended for his action because his honesty may have saved lives.

Teenagers make mistakes. As parents we should encourage our children to report their mistakes to us so that we can help them learn from their experiences. Even if we need to discipline them for their mistake, we should always thank them for being honest and telling us, and we should discuss with them how they could have handled the situation better. Mistakes are a great learning opportunity for our children if we encourage them to share their mistake with us, we respond with patience and understanding, and we help them learn from the experience.

Preschool Children - When children are young, parents take great delight in watching them learn new skills. Children show us, and we share, their pure and authentic joy the first time they kick a ball, complete a puzzle, build a block tower higher than ever before, or ride a bike. We know that these successes are not immediate but take lots of practice. Parents encourage children to keep trying, instinctively knowing that mastering such skills takes time, patience, and practice. For preschool children, behaviors such as trying new things and sticking with a task that is challenging are essential. They lay the groundwork for a child to know that it is ok to fail, that new skills take time to learn, and that loving parents understand this too and are their most enthusiastic cheerleaders along the journey.

Infants and Toddlers - People with a growth mindset believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. Infants learning to crawl and toddlers learning to walk are at the perfect age to develop a growth mindset, and parents are the key. Tune into your baby as she repeatedly attempts to crawl. Tune into your toddler who keeps getting up time and time again after each fall. Show your unconditional support and enthusiasm for their dedication to the process and make a big splash each time progress is made. Babies and toddlers are not too young to learn an important life message, "I keep on trying until I figure it out!"

A Note to Parents

There is perhaps no greater area of Personal Responsibility for parents than raising their children to be caring, confident and competent adults. Helping our children learn to "do the right thing" whether it is admitting a mistake, keeping a promise, or persevering in the face of challenges is one of the most important life lessons we can teach our children.

Promoting Social and Emotional Learning at Home is brought to you by Aperture Education (www.ApertureEd.com) and The Devereux Center for Resilient Children (www.CenterforResilientChildren.org). Feel free to visit our websites for additional ideas.

Next Week's topic – Decision Making