

Teaching Children Responsibility

What would you do if . . .

- Your daughter kept forgetting to feed her new puppy?
- Your children complained every time you asked them to help out?
- Your son broke a window and blamed it on his best friend?

It's not always easy to act responsibly. It's tempting sometimes to lie back and let someone else take over. Or to blame another for what you did. Children are more likely to resist such urges if they learn at a young age that we all have to pitch in and help. Responsibility has to be taught and encouraged.

Setting the scene

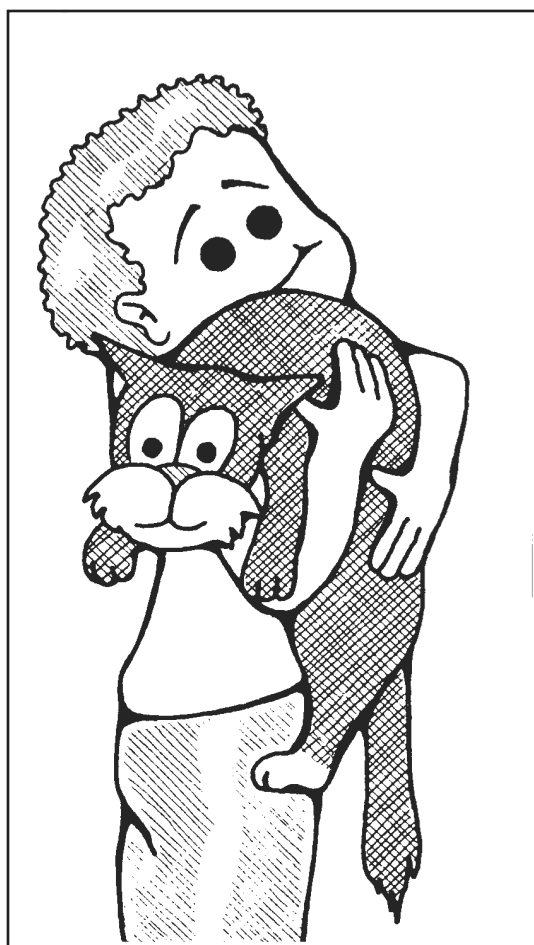


Some parents have to beg, badger, and bribe their children to do chores. Others give up and do everything for their children. Neither of these methods gives children a chance to develop:

- The knowledge that they are useful members of the family
- A healthy attitude toward work
- The ability to see a job through to the end

Responsibility has to be expected of children from an early age. Part of growing up is learning how to take care of yourself and care for others. Living together means sharing the load. Children who don't learn these things are ill prepared for life.

Responsibility in childhood prepares children for future responsibilities. Children can take on more responsibility than many of us think. And children enjoy the feeling of accomplishment that work gives them. Their confidence blossoms as they master each new task. Each success makes them want to contribute in new and more complex ways.



A good act to follow



You have a lot to do with the attitudes your children develop toward responsibility. If you argue every night about whose turn it is to do the dishes, put off doing unpleasant tasks until the last minute, or make promises and don't follow through, then you shouldn't be surprised if your children aren't dependable.

If you forget your children until it is time to take out the garbage, ask children to do things they can't do, or give children only menial chores and order them to cooperate, then they will be resentful.

If you take over and do things whenever children make a mistake, don't bother to show them how to do things, or criticize their efforts to do things themselves, then they'll never learn.

But if you:

- Expect children to give as well as receive
- Set an example for children to follow
- Enlist children as partners
- Teach children how to do things themselves

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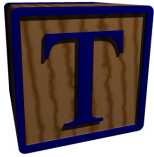
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HELPING • CHILDREN • GROW

- Give children time to learn, and
- Provide materials that encourage responsibility,

then you will help your children become more responsible. When children learn that their help is needed if the show is to go on, they usually get their act together pretty quickly.

Sharing the load



There isn't as much work to be done in most households as there was 100 years ago, when many of life's necessities were home produced. But there still are many things that must be taken care of to keep any family going. And there are many ways children can help out in these tasks. For example:

Housecleaning

- Picking up
- Sweeping floors
- Dusting
- Vacuuming rugs
- Mopping floors
- Cleaning toilets

Preparing meals

- Shopping
- Putting away groceries
- Setting the table
- Cleaning the table
- Washing and drying dishes
- Cooking

Doing the laundry

- Collecting dirty clothes and linen
- Sorting laundry
- Washing and drying
- Folding and putting away
- Ironing
- Sewing and mending

Maintaining the house

- Watering plants
- Polishing metals
- Changing lightbulbs
- Washing windows
- Doing minor repairs
- Painting and wallpapering

Maintaining the yard

- Mowing the lawn
- Raking leaves
- Trimming hedges and trees
- Planting and weeding
- Sweeping sidewalks
- Shoveling snow

Caring for pets

- Feeding
- Walking the dog
- Cleaning cage or box
- Grooming
- Playing with pets
- Buying food and supplies

Caring for self

- Bathing
- Getting dressed
- Picking up after self
- Keeping bedroom tidy
- Hanging up clothes
- Making the bed

Miscellaneous household jobs

- Answering the phone
- Emptying trash or garbage
- Bringing in the newspaper
- Getting mail
- Running errands

Getting these tasks done quickly is easier if everyone takes part. In addition to assigning tasks, there are lots of ways to distribute the load:

- A **family meeting** where everyone agrees on the fairest way to share responsibilities
- A **signup list** that gives everyone a chance to choose chores that they are able to do for a week or a month
- A **workwheel** that is turned daily or weekly to assign everyone a new set of duties within his or her level of ability
- **Drawing lots** out of a hat or bag
- **Posting ads** when help is needed for a special task

When children see all the jobs that must be done for the family to function, and know they have a say in what they do, they are more willing to do their share.

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