



Raising Responsible Kids

You may wonder, “How can I get my child to be more responsible for brushing his teeth, picking up toys, or getting ready on time?” You may want your child to be responsible, but what does responsibility mean to you? Responsibility is not a clear-cut trait, but a blend of independence with helpfulness, consideration, and sensitivity to the feelings of others. A responsible person may be thought of as respectful, accountable for actions, and dependable.



Ways to help children become responsible:

- **Be a responsible person** - Set an example. Be on time. Speak respectfully to others. Accept the blame when you make mistakes. Talk about decisions you make.
- **Encourage children to make choices and solve problems** - “Do you want to wear the blue sweater or red shirt?” “You both want to play with the blocks, how can you work this out?”
- **State your expectations and rules clearly and positively** - Tell children what you want them to do. Be specific, “Put the truck on the shelf”, rather than “clean up this mess.”
- **Let children experience consequences** - **Help** children recognize that actions bring results, both positive and negative. Don’t jump to bail them out when consequences are safe.
- **Let children know you believe in them and think they can do it** - **Children** are more likely to live up to our expectations.

Most parents believe that chores are a way of teaching responsibility. Even when parents don’t involve kids in chores---they think they should!

Children learn skills like being helpful, sharing and showing concern for others by participating in household tasks. We often start by teaching children to pick up after themselves. But they gain more “helping” skills when the work they do benefits others. Things like taking care of a pet, helping prepare meals, bringing diapers for a sibling are some examples of helping others.

Researchers have found children as young as 18 months offer to help with household tasks. When parents made a simple statement such as “Just look at those papers” toddlers would respond by picking things up. The key was leaving the task undone—so the child had the opportunity to do it. The amount of work performed is linked to the amount parents leave for children to do. The “offers” of help may become less frequent as children get older, so you might choose to start early!

There are benefits and challenges when involving your preschooler in household chores. You will have to make your own choices. But if you want your youngster to help out, you may wish to start when they show interest—which often is before their 2nd birthday!

Author: Debbie McClellan, Family Life Educator, Effingham Center
Editor: Patti Faughn, Family Life Educator, Springfield Center, Spring 2005

For additional information contact:

Unit Leader Name, Unit Leader
University of Illinois Extension
Insert Unit Name
Insert Mailing Address
Insert City, State, Zip
Insert Phone Number

Patti Faughn, Family Life Educator
University of Illinois Extension
Springfield Center
PO Box 8199
Springfield, IL 62791
Ph: 217/782-6515