

Teaching Children **Responsibility** *for their* **Learning** **& Behavior**



*Ways Families Can Help Their
Children Do Better in School*



The Fourth ‘R’ for School Success Is Responsibility

Every parent knows the importance of the three “Rs”: reading, writing and arithmetic. Some call them the basics of a good education. But there’s a fourth “R”—responsibility—and it’s also basic to learning.

Responsible students are in charge of their own learning and behavior at home and at school. They do schoolwork and chores without being reminded—because they are self-motivated and self-directed.

Responsible students don’t make excuses or blame others for their problems. They make good choices about what to do and when to do it. They are conscientious and resourceful—and they don’t quit easily.

But none of this is inborn. Taking responsibility for learning and behavior must be taught. Because families are a child’s most influential teachers, the very best place for children to learn it is right at home.

This booklet is full of ideas to help you nurture your child’s desire and ability to take responsibility for being a successful student.

Tip: *Don’t expect to put all the ideas in this booklet into practice right away. The best way to make changes is one step at a time—and don’t forget to celebrate progress!*

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY QUIZ:

Do I Take Responsibility for My Learning and Behavior?

Have your child take this responsibility quiz by answering each item with *yes* or *no*.

1. I regularly set goals for things I want to accomplish.
2. I manage my time and I set priorities to make sure I do the important things first.
3. I keep track of my school assignments and I have a daily study plan.
4. I have a step-by-step method of studying for tests.
5. I complete reading assignments and make sure I understand the material.
6. I have all the tools I need when I do my schoolwork—dictionary, pencils, pens, paper, scissors, etc.
7. I make sure I'm ready for the next day before I go to bed.
8. I spend at least as much time reading for fun as I spend watching shows or playing video games.
9. I have a regular process that I use to solve problems.
10. I listen well in class and follow directions carefully.
11. I get along well with teachers and other students, and I know how to resolve conflicts peacefully.
12. I know that I am responsible for what I do and that I must accept the consequences of my behavior.
13. I know my family's expectations about such things as school attendance, studying, chores, honesty and drug and alcohol use.

How did your child do?

Seven or more *yes* answers is very good. Five is average. Fewer than three *yes* answers indicates real improvement is needed. Talk about how your child did, then look for ideas in this booklet for ways to improve.

Responsible Students Set Goals for Themselves

Goals help children focus on what's important and what's not. When children are goal-oriented, they are more likely to say *no* to irresponsible behaviors—because they are saying *yes* to their visions of the future.

Children can set goals for schoolwork, getting along with others, sports and leisure activities—or anything else they want to improve.

Teach Goal-Setting

Setting weekly goals helps children experience results quickly and apply lessons going forward.

- 1. Help your child identify one goal for the upcoming week.**
It might be turning in a book report on time. It may be getting at least 90 percent correct on a spelling test.
- 2. Have your child write the goal** on a piece of paper. Post it on the refrigerator or a bulletin board.
- 3. Talk about how to accomplish the goal.** Help your child break the goal down into smaller steps. For example, "You could read two chapters every day. Then you can spend a day writing your report and another day revising it."
- 4. Ask how things are going** as the week progresses. If problems come up, talk about possible solutions. If your child falls behind in reading, for example, a 10-minute extension of bedtime might help.
- 5. At the end of the week,** help your child evaluate how well things went. Did your child achieve the goal? Why or why not?
Most importantly, praise effort. Then help your child set a new goal for next week.

Responsible Students Learn to Plan Their Time

Responsible people meet their obligations—whether it’s turning in schoolwork when it’s due or finishing a task for work. But it takes planning.

Use a Time Log

A common excuse children use for not doing what they need to do is, “I don’t have enough time!”

The fact is: They have time. They just need to learn to use it wisely. To do that, they need to see where their time goes.

For one week, have your child log activities every hour. At the end of the week, talk about how your child’s time is really being spent.



Set a Daily Schedule ...

Many children are natural procrastinators. They put things off until the last possible minute, or they don’t do them at all.

Help your child make a daily schedule of what needs to be done—and by a reasonable hour.

... or a Weekly Schedule

The daily schedule can also be expanded to a weekly schedule. On a sheet of paper, have your child make a heading for each day of the week, then fill in the times and the various activities.

Students Need a Study Plan & Ways to Track Assignments

One of the best ways to be responsible and keep track of school assignments is to use an assignment book or chart. Have your child record assignments daily. Each night, you can review and initial them. Your child can make assignment sheets like this:

Assignment Sheet for: Monday			
Subject	Assignment	Completed	Parent's Initials
Math			
English			
Social Studies			
Science			

Develop a Study Plan

Like anything else, children study better if they have a plan. Talk with your child and make plans together about:

- When to study each day. (Studying should be an *everyday* habit. If there is no assignment, your child can review.)
- How long to study.
- Where to study.
- What subjects to study first, second, third, etc.

Track Long-Term Assignments

Many children have trouble managing assignments that require several weeks to complete. Help your child use a calendar to budget time.

First, show your child how to break the job down into small steps. Next, help your student plan how much time each step will take. Then have your child mark the due date for each step on the calendar.

A Step-by-Step Method Helps Students Study for Tests

Help your child learn that the “secret” of studying for tests is first having a plan for studying every day—and then doing a self-test review a few days before the exam.

Do a Self-Test Review

After becoming familiar with a subject through daily study, all your child needs to do before a test is a self-test review.

Help your child:

- **Make up test questions** the teacher might ask.
- **Try to answer the questions** and correct any wrong answers.
- **Review notes**, handouts, textbooks and learning objectives.
- **Relate new information** to previous knowledge.
- **Memorize facts and formulas.** Help your child make memorizing a game.
- **Do a short review right before bedtime.** Sleep helps children absorb what they learn.



Students Can Take Responsibility for Assigned Reading

Because assigned reading isn't something children hand in, they may think it's less important than other schoolwork. But keeping up with reading assignments is a key to school success. Your child can take responsibility for assigned reading with these strategies.

Check for Understanding

Children can ask themselves questions as they read. This helps them monitor their own comprehension. Examples include:

- "What is the main idea of this section or chapter?"
- "What details support the main idea?"
- "How does the information fit in with what I have already learned?"

Just keeping those questions in mind will help your child find the answers—and think about the information. The result is better understanding.

Take Notes

For many kids, just reading the material isn't enough. Note-taking can help students understand and remember what they read. Have your child:

- **Write down just the important points.** These are often found in the introduction, headings, words in boldface and the summary.
- **Include key details.** Jot down the most important facts that support the author's arguments.
- **Create study flash cards.** As your child reads, suggest writing a question or key word on the front of each card. Then have your child write the answer or definition on the back.

Explain It to Someone

After reading and taking notes, another effective strategy is to have your child tell you or someone else about the material. When children share what they've learned, they develop a deeper understanding of the material.

A Craftsman Can't Work Without the Right Tools

Just like all workers, your child needs to be properly equipped to do the job of student—both at home and at school. Being prepared for class tells the teacher that your child is responsible and serious about learning.

Create a Schoolwork Survival Kit

A schoolwork survival kit contains everything a child needs to make studying and learning easier.

A typical kit should fit in a schoolbag. It might include:

- A **plastic pouch** for pens, pencils, erasers, calculators and other school supplies.
- A **folder with front and back pockets** for storing important papers.
- **Extra notebook paper.**
- **Self-stick notes for reminders.**
- A **list of important phone numbers and email addresses.**
- **An assignment planner.**

For many students, school supplies can actually make learning more fun and effective.

A special pen, ruler, highlighter or notepad may give learning an exciting new look.



Responsible Students Are Ready Ahead of Time

You can help your child learn that being late or forgetting something doesn't just happen—it is a choice. Responsible children learn to make responsible choices.

Your child can choose to avoid morning chaos, for example, by taking five or 10 minutes before bedtime to get ready for the next day: Get homework papers signed. Pack the backpack. Make lunch. Lay out clothes.

Cardboard Boxes Save the Day

A cardboard box big enough to hold everything your child takes to school each day can make mornings easier. Have your child choose a place for the box. Every afternoon, the first task is to place all school belongings in the box. When assignments are finished, they go in the box, too. In the morning, the box is your child's last stop before heading out the door.

Successful Students Read as Much as They Use Digital Devices

Research shows that children who spend too much recreational time in front of screens do not read as well as those whose families set limits. These steps will encourage your child to limit screen time and read more:

- **Track recreational screen time.** Have your child track time spent watching shows, playing video games and going online. This may lead to the realization that your child can spend a lot less time in front of a screen and more time reading.
- **Be a reading role model.** Make sure your child sees you reading and hears you talking about what you read.
- **Challenge your child** to make reading time equal to screen time for one week.
- **Help your child find interesting things to read.** Identify your child's interests and look for books, articles and magazines on those topics. A librarian can help your child find materials on any topic.

Responsible Students Use a Problem-Solving Process

It's natural to want to solve your child's problems. But that won't teach the discipline of responsible decision-making.

Here are five useful steps your child can take when faced with a problem:

- 1. Define what the problem is.**
Summarize it in just a few words.
- 2. Generate several possible solutions.**
Few problems have just one possible solution. Ask, "What else might you do to solve this problem?"
Older children can write their ideas down.
- 3. Evaluate the solutions.**
List the positive and negative effects of each possible solution.
- 4. Decide on a solution.**
- 5. Develop a plan to make the solution work!**
Help your child consider what should be done first, second and third. The problem won't be solved until your child puts the plan into action.

Listening and Following Directions Are Key Skills

Children who pay attention in school learn more. Here's an activity to help improve your child's ability to listen, understand and follow directions carefully:

Practice 'Active Listening' Together

When children understand the directions they are given, they are better able to follow them. Practice this process at home when giving your child directions:

- **Take turns speaking.** Only one person can talk at a time. The first speaker talks about something. The other listens.
- **Focus on the speaker.** Look at the person who is talking. Nod your head. Concentrate on what the speaker is saying.
- **Summarize what the speaker just said.** When the first speaker is finished, the listener must summarize what was said *before* making a new point.

Responsible Students Get Along Well With Others

Many of children's school problems are social ones. Often, children don't take responsibility for getting along with others because they don't know how.

Teach your child this three-step process for resolving personal conflicts:

1. **Ask, "Why did you do that?"** Asking others the reasons for their actions helps open dialogue. It gives room for them to say, "I didn't realize ..." or "I'm sorry." Or they can explain their motives.
2. **Say, "When you did that, I felt ..."** This helps a child identify feelings. It helps the other person see that their actions have an impact.
3. **Say, "I would feel better if ..."** This step requires a child to think in advance about what will help resolve the situation. Conflicts are much easier to resolve when at least one of the parties has a suggestion for how to move forward.

Taking Responsibility Means Accepting Consequences

A responsible child understands that actions have consequences. Parents can help children take responsibility for their choices by not letting them off the hook.

Don't let your child make excuses for negative behavior. Talk about how choices have consequences, and let your child experience the consequences of personal choices.

If your child leaves an assignment at home, for example, don't offer to drive it to school. Say, "I'm sorry, but actions have consequences. You'll have to tell your teacher you left it at home." Also, set consequences at home for inappropriate behavior. A child who gets in a fight may not be allowed to play with friends that week.

To be effective, a consequence should meet three criteria:

1. **It is logically related** to the misbehavior. Children need to see the connection.
2. **It is respectful** of your child.
3. **It is reasonable** to you and your child.

Keep in mind that consequences must be consistently enforced—every time—or they won't be effective.



Students Need to Know What Their Families Expect

Despite what children sometimes say, they need and want limits. That's why family rules and expectations are so important.

Develop Rules That Work

While no one but you can make the rules for home behavior, it is important for your children to be involved. Getting children's suggestions helps them feel that their views have been heard—and makes it more likely that they will follow the rules.

Talk about specific family rules you would like to make. After getting your children's ideas, decide on the final rules and explain them. Together, write them on a sheet of paper and put it up for all to see.

Talk About Your Expectations

Children want to please their parents and do their best to live up to their expectations. But do your children know what your expectations are?

Parents communicate expectations to children in many ways—by what they say, how they act and how they react to others. Think about what you expect of your child and discuss your expectations often.

A Final Word

It may take a lot of effort to get a child to take responsibility for learning and behavior. But it will pay off.

Teaching such things as how to study, how to organize time, how to solve problems and how to get along with others can help your child become more responsible.

As your child becomes a self-confident, independent learner, you will have met one of your most important responsibilities. You will have taught your child the attitudes and skills that are necessary to grow into a responsible and capable adult.



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