

# Building Responsibility in Your Teenager

## What Do We Mean by Responsibility?

None of us is born acting responsibly. A responsible character is formed over time. It is made up of our outlook and daily habits associated with feelings, thoughts, and actions. Responsible people act the way they should whether or not anyone is watching. They do so because they understand that it's right and because they have the courage and self-control to act decently, even when tempted to do otherwise. In the scripture, Jesus implores us to be salt and light in the world:

*“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:13-16*

As Christians, it is our duty to act responsibly, so the world might know that we are God's and that He might be glorified.

We want our children to appreciate the importance of being responsible. We also want them to develop the habits and strength to act this way in their everyday lives. Learning to be responsible includes learning to:

- Respect and show **compassion** for others
  - As part of being responsible, teenagers need to respect and show concern for the well-being of other people. Respect ranges from using basic manners to having compassion for the suffering of others. Compassion is developed by trying to see things from the point of view of others, and learning that their feelings resemble our own.

Respect for others also includes the habit of treating people fairly as individuals, regardless of race, sex, or ethnic group. As we mature, respect includes realizing that not all our obligations to others, such as caring for a family member who is sick, are chosen freely. And it includes tolerance for people who do not share our beliefs or likes or dislikes, as long as they do not harm others.

These habits are especially important because many of the wrongs people commit result from indifference to the suffering they cause.

- Practice **honesty** as a matter of course
  - Honesty means telling the truth. It means not misleading others for our own benefit. It also means trying to make decisions, especially important ones, on the basis of evidence rather than personal prejudice. Honesty includes dealing with other people and being honest with ourselves.

To understand the importance of being truthful to others, our teenagers need to learn that living together depends on trust. Without honesty, trusting each other becomes impossible.

Honesty with ourselves involves facing up to our own mistakes and biases, even when we have to admit them to others. It includes self-criticism. The point is to learn from our errors and to do our best to correct them, not to dwell on them.

- Show **courage** in standing up for our principles
  - Courage is taking a position and doing what is right, even at the risk of some loss. It means being neither reckless nor cowardly, but facing up to our duties. It includes physical courage, intellectual courage to make decisions on the basis of evidence, and moral courage to stand up for our principles.

Courage does not mean never being afraid. It can involve trying to overcome our fears, such as a fear of rejection. Courage becomes especially important for teenagers, because they often have to stand up against peer pressure to do the wrong thing, such as using drugs.

- Develop **self-control** in acting on our principles
  - Self-control is the ability to resist inappropriate behavior in order to act responsibly. It relates to all of the different aspects of responsibility mentioned so far, including respect and compassion for others, honesty, and courage. It involves persistence and sticking to long-term commitments. It also includes dealing effectively with emotions, such as anger, and developing patience.
- Maintain self-**respect**.
  - People with self-respect take satisfaction in appropriate behavior and hard-won accomplishments. They don't need to put others down or have a lot of money in order to respect themselves. People who respect themselves also view selfishness, loss of self-control, recklessness, cowardice, and dishonesty as wrong and unworthy of them. As they mature, if they have learned the lessons of responsibility, they will develop a good conscience to guide them.

In addition, people who respect themselves respect their own health and safety. Similarly, they are unwilling to be manipulated by others. Patience or tolerance does not mean allowing others to mistreat us.

While we help teens have high standards for themselves, we also need to let them know that failure is no embarrassment when we have done our best. For example, losing a game when we have played our best, and our opponents have simply played better, is no disgrace.

## A PARENT QUIZ

### *Are you Helping Your Teen Develop Self-Discipline?*

Here's a quiz to see if you're helping your teen develop self-discipline. Give yourself five points for something you usually do, zero points for something you never do, or any score in between.



- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I don't rescue my teen. If he gets himself into a jam, I let him feel the consequences.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I do not do things for my teen that he can do for himself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I encourage my teen to take part in activities, such as band, that develop self-discipline.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I encourage my teen to create his own study schedule and stick to it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I give my teen choices about which responsibilities he will share in our home.

\_\_\_\_\_ **TOTAL**

### **SCORING**

Above 20: You're raising a self-disciplined teen.

15 to 19: Average.

Below 15: You may want to try some of the ideas in the above quiz.

## A Process for Building Responsibility in Your Teenager

1. **Give your teenager age-appropriate tasks (Luke 2:52)** -- Your teen's self-esteem and sense of responsibility will be enhanced with the accomplishment of appropriate tasks. The key is to adequately challenge and encourage growth and improvement. Underchallenged teens may struggle with boredom and restlessness, while overchallenged ones become overwhelmed with frustration and give up easily. Communication with other parents and professionals, plus your own knowledge of your child's personality, is an excellent way to determine what tasks are age-appropriate for your child.
2. **View mistakes as learning opportunities (Proverbs 24:16)** -- There is an inflationary price tag attached to teenager's mistakes - the older the child, the steeper the consequences he or she will encounter. When children are allowed to experience the negative consequences of poor choices made in their younger years, they are far more likely to assume responsibility and make wise choices

when they are teens. Start where you are. Help yourself to deal more effectively with current problems by viewing your teen's mistakes as significant learning opportunities.

- a. **The Four R's Can Be An Additional Aid in Helping Teens Learn From All Their Mistakes.** Teens make mistakes. (So do adults, of course.) But mistakes can turn into learning opportunities. The next time you or your teen makes a mistake, try to use it as a chance to improve. Use these four R's as a way to recover:

- i. **Recognize.** Before your teen can learn from a mistake, she has to recognize what she did. She needs to identify exactly what caused the problem. Saying, "I'm no good in Spanish" won't fix the problem. Saying, "I didn't study" can help your teen see a solution.
- ii. **Responsibility.** Your teen needs to accept responsibility for what she did wrong. Saying, "My teacher is mean" won't solve the problem.
- iii. **Reconciliation.** Sometimes a mistake hurts other people. Your teen needs to tell anyone she has hurt that she is sorry.
- iv. **Resolution.** Finally, your teen needs to come up with a solution that is satisfactory to everyone involved. The next time your teen makes a mistake, help him/her work through these four R's. They can help turn a mistake into an opportunity for growth.

3. **Use consequences and empathy to teach the lesson (Galatians 6:1)** -- You help build responsibility when you respond to mistakes with empathy, rather than anger. When you get angry, your teen focuses on your emotion, rather than on his or her own behavior. To respond with empathy consider how the situation looks from your teen's viewpoint. Then simply communicate your understanding of their perspective. Empathy may be as simple as saying, "You're really disappointed". Remember, when you validate your teenager's feelings the teaching value of the consequence is enhanced.
4. **Give the task again (Philemon 1:21)** -- This communicates that you believe your teenager is capable of handling the problem and learning from the consequences of poor choices. Of course, he or she may have to make several mistakes before finally accomplishing the task. However, your teen's self-esteem and sense of responsibility will soar with the accomplishment! View each mistake as a learning opportunity and think of your teenager as merely researching what doesn't work. Your student's self-esteem and sense of responsibility will flourish when he or she eventually masters the task.

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- Practice \_\_\_\_\_ as a matter of course
- Show \_\_\_\_\_ in standing up for our principles
- Develop \_\_\_\_\_ in acting on our principles
- Maintain self-\_\_\_\_\_.

### A PARENT QUIZ -- Are you Helping Your Teen Develop Self-Discipline?

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5. **Give your teenager \_\_\_\_\_ tasks (Luke 2:52)**
  - a. Under-challenged teens may struggle with \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. Over-challenged ones become overwhelmed with \_\_\_\_\_.
  
6. **View \_\_\_\_\_ as learning opportunities (Proverbs 24:16)**
  - a. **The Four R's Can Be An Additional Aid in Helping Teens Learn From All Their Mistakes.** Teens make mistakes. (So do adults, of course.) But mistakes can turn into learning opportunities. The next time you or your teen makes a mistake, try to use it as a chance to improve. Use these four R's as a way to recover:
    - i. \_\_\_\_\_
    - ii. \_\_\_\_\_
    - iii. \_\_\_\_\_
    - iv. \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. **Use consequences and \_\_\_\_\_ to teach the lesson (Galatians 6:1).** Remember, when you validate your teenager's feelings the teaching value of the consequence is enhanced.
  
8. **Give the \_\_\_\_\_ again (Philemon 1:21).** View each mistake as a learning opportunity and think of your teenager as merely researching what doesn't work. Your student's self-esteem and sense of responsibility will flourish when he or she eventually masters the task.