

Responsibility

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As a parent, it is my responsibility to attempt to instill in my children traits and behaviours that they, and those around them, will value and find desirable. One of these is that of being responsible. As a tutor, Boy Scout Leader, SCUBA instructor, Agency Manager, and Business Owner, I've also had the opportunity to observe how a variety of people of many ages and education levels have exercised or avoided their responsibilities. While these observations were over several decades, they have now accumulated to the point of asking the question again as a grandparent: How does one person instill the trait of responsibility in another?

First and foremost, it must be the responsibility of the first person to do so. Instilling character traits in your own offspring is something you should do, but bringing it out in total strangers is nothing more than poking your nose in someone else's business. The people who may work for you, fall somewhere in the middle.

Responsibility also includes subtle variations of the theme. There is the question of "to whom?" Some people are responsible to others and others are responsible to themselves. The self-responsible person derives the drive to preserve their ideals through their behaviour largely as a result of a healthy and appropriate self-esteem. That is to say that the self-view must be strong and it must be deserved. Those with no innate sense of responsibility are, in reality, not responsible, but are reacting to being accountable.

As a parent, the newest little ones can only be held accountable. We cannot rely on a two year old to be responsible. But by using well-metered accountability, we can demonstrate the value of becoming responsible, and develop the secondary benefit of helping that young person develop a proper self-esteem. This can be tricky, however, and an overly severe application of accountability, especially in young ones, can backfire and lead to a lowered self-esteem and a self-image of failure.

Thus, along with accountability, we must apply the salve of forgiveness. Failure must also be accompanied by correction, in order to avoid repetitive errors. As the parent or teacher, the actions of accountability, forgiveness, and correction must be directed at the failure, and not the person. The person ought to be bolstered by the correction and left with the image of future success.

The process, then of teaching responsibility, whether it be to child, student, or employee, is a process flowing thus: Accountability, forgiveness, correction, and encouragement. That sequence conveys respect over derision, instilling the self-respect that will eventually blossom into self-imposed responsibility, and a healthy and earned self-esteem.