



Responsibility Summary

Why Responsibility?

Children learn about who they are and how they relate to others through sensitive, caring interactions with you. These interactions impact their ability to make responsible decisions that are fair, kind, and safe; to learn about and manage their feelings; and to trust in you as a caregiver. Your focus on responsibility is essential to developing lifelong habits of responsible decision making.

Tip These steps are best done when you and your child are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and actively building a healthy parent relationship will support these steps.

Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- Ask your child, *“What do you notice? How do you feel? How do you think the other child feels? What are you wondering?”* For example, if your child is tempted to play with their sister’s markers without asking, help your child notice their own thoughts and reactions and the thoughts and reactions of their sister when she finds out what happened. You might even name what expressions and body language you notice.
 - *“I see you are tempted to use your sister’s markers without asking her permission. I wonder how she will feel if she knew you were going to do this. Do you think we should ask her first?”*
- When reading books, notice when the characters are about to make responsible or irresponsible decisions. Take a moment to pause the story and ask your child, *“What do you think will happen if he makes that decision? What would you do?”* Later in the story, you can ask, *“How do you think that character is feeling? Do you think it felt good to make a responsible decision?”*
- If your child is feeling unsure about how to describe all of the feelings that occur when trying to be responsible or how others are feeling, consider asking questions, naming what you notice, and leaving plenty of quiet space after your questions so they have an opportunity to share their ideas too.
 - *“How did you feel when you first saw the markers?”*
 - *“Was there anything that made you feel worried?”*
 - *“How do you feel right now?”*

- *“How do you think you will feel next time?”*
- *“Is there anything we can do to remember how responsible you were today?”*
- Practicing naming feelings will enable your child to identify their own feelings as well as others and seek support when they need it. This includes describing and naming the reason they are making one choice and not another. Pointing out the responsibility that they demonstrate will help them notice it and know it is there when the next challenge arises.

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Explain why it is “ok” or “not ok” to make a certain choice. Be consistent in only allowing them to make choices that you say are ok and then helping them to begin to apply those responsibility guidelines on their own. When they make a responsible decision, show them that you noticed and tell them why you think that was a good choice. An example of an opportunity to be responsible might be deciding whether to eat all of the snacks in the big bowl or whether to offer some to other family members too.
- Read and “pretend play” together.
 - During reading time, select a book of faces to help your child learn to identify different feelings. Point out how you can tell what each face is feeling and practice recreating those cues with your child.
- Share your thoughts and feelings. Talk about what you notice, how you are feeling, why you are feeling it, and what signs you are giving even when it’s not comfortable. *“I see that you are playing in the sandbox with your shoes on. Do you see my lips are frowning? That means I am sad because you didn’t listen to my instructions about taking your shoes off first. I am going to ask you to get out of the sandbox and take your shoes off please.”*
- Talk aloud about the ways in which you respond to your own big feelings: *“It made me feel so much better to tell you how I was feeling and to have you take your shoes off before playing in the sandbox.”*
- Develop pride in making responsible choices. For example, when your child uses language that ignores someone else’s feelings like, “I don’t care if it will make him upset,” you may respond with:
 - *“Sometimes it is not easy to help others, but I know you can do it.”*
 - *“Do you remember last time when this seemed hard? You took a deep breath and were able to do it.”*
 - *“I wonder if we can do something that will help us get through this challenge.”*

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Provide opportunities for your child to make responsible decisions that are just the right size for them. For example, if your child really wants to color with their sister’s markers, stop them before they go to get them and make a plan for how they are going to ask permission first. This is much easier than waiting to mention responsibility until your child already has the markers in their hand and is ready to color with them. The goal is to come up with experiences that help them remember what it means to be responsible and are just beyond what they are comfortable with.

- Talk about responsible decisions in moments where there is no pressure to make one. For example, you can point out how good it feels to find your book waiting in just the right spot on the shelf. *“Do you remember that we put this away after we read it yesterday? It is so easy to find because we were so responsible.”*
- Provide books, dolls, and other materials at home that let children practice responsible decision making. When you are babysitting the baby doll, make the responsible choice to change her diaper before you take her outside to play. Point out that she probably feels a lot better now and that is what it means to be a responsible caregiver.
- Initially, practice may require more teaching, but avoid taking over and doing it for your child.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child’s Development and Success

- Use “Show me…” statements like *“Show me you can make a kind decision that will help everyone.”*
- Recognize effort by using “I notice…” statements like: *“I noticed that you were uncertain about what to do, but you asked your friend how it would make her feel. I love seeing that you care about how your actions impact others.”*
- On days with extra challenges when you can see your child is struggling to make responsible decisions, offer confidence in your child’s ability to calm down and try again. In a gentle, non-public way, you can say, *“I noticed you were trying to complete that task, but I know you are hungry. Let’s get a snack and then come back and try later.”*
- Actively reflect on how your child is feeling when approaching challenges. You can offer reflections like:
 - *“You seem worried about forgetting to take your backpack to the first day of preschool tomorrow. Shall we put a note on the door so we won’t forget?”*
 - You can also offer comfort when facing new situations to help your child gain a sense of security and face challenges rather than backing away.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Recognize and call out when it is going well. If your child was not careful with the neighbor’s toys last time you visited, but seems more responsible today, notice the change. *“I notice you have gotten more careful with the neighbor’s toys. I bet she feels happier to share them with you!”*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Notice when your child shows a sense of responsibility or recovers smoothly from a challenging situation.

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