



# Responsibility Summary

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## Why Responsibility?

Teens ages 15-19 are working on understanding their own emerging adult identity and what it means to act responsibly. Making responsible decisions can involve identifying problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating, reflecting, and considering the ethical implications or consequences of choices. Such an important skill takes a lot of planning and practice for a parent to teach and many opportunities for a teen to try out and redo before it is mastered.

### Step 1. Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- *“Tell me about what you are doing (or what needs to be done) to take care of yourself?”* (exercise, eat healthy, get enough sleep, time for yourself, manage stress)
- *“Tell me about what you are doing (or what needs to be done) to take care of your possessions?”* (pets, clothes, room)
- *“Tell me about what you are doing (or what needs to be done) to take care of your relationships?”* (spending time with friends, connecting with family)
  - *“How’s all of this going?”*
  - *“What are you doing (or could be done) on your own?”*
  - *“What can I do to help you?”*

Use your best listening skills! Listen closely to what is most concerning to your teen without projecting your own thoughts, concerns, and feelings.

**Trap** Avoid letting the question turn into an accusation. Remember to stay calm and that the goal of the question is to help the teen uncover feelings.

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

- Learn together! The purpose of teaching responsibility is to grow the skills of taking responsibility through constructive actions such as making healthy choices, caring for your environment and possessions, caring for your relationships, and repairing harm.
- Model behaviors (and your teen will notice and learn!).
- Call out responsibility when you see it.

- Brainstorm ways you can take responsibility together. *“What are some ideas you have that would help to leave this space better than you found it?” “Our neighbor just had surgery, what are some ideas you can think of to help them out?”*
- Normalize conversations about feelings in family life.
- Teach assertive communication through I-messages such as *“I feel \_\_\_\_\_ (insert feeling word) when you \_\_\_\_\_ (name the words or actions that upset you) because\_\_\_\_\_.”*
- Teach your child to repair harm. When they damage or break an object or hurt a sibling’s feelings, talk to them about what they could do to repair the object and help heal the relationship.

**Tip** When you are reflecting on your teen’s feelings, you can think about unpacking a suitcase. Frequently, there are layers of feelings that need to be examined and understood, not just one. Anger might just be the top layer. After you’ve discovered why your teen was angry, you might ask about other layers. Was there hurt or a sense of rejection involved? Perhaps they feel embarrassed? Fully unpacking the suitcase of feelings will help your teen feel better understood by you as they become more self-aware.

**Tip** Create a ritual of sharing words of love and care at bedtime. Consider that ending the day reflecting on how much you appreciate one another could just be the best way to send your teen off to sleep. Teens need more sleep, but worries about their social pressures can get in the way. Your love at bedtime will support them through this.

### Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills, Confidence, and Develop Habits

- Allow your teen opportunities to take responsibility for their own tasks or relationships -- even when you know you could do it faster or better.
- Proactively remind. Before going out with friends, you might say, *“Remember as you are going out tonight that you need to check in with me and be home by the curfew we agreed upon?”*
- Offer limited and authentic choices.
- Recognize effort by using “I notice...” statements like, *“I notice how you went back to your sister to talk to her after you fought to make things better. That’s how you take responsibility and heal the relationship.”*
- Follow through on repairing harm.

**Tip** Include reflection on the day in your dinnertime routine. You might ask, “What happened today that made you happy?” or “What were the best moments in your day?” Teens may not have the chance to reflect on what’s good and abundant in their lives throughout the day, yet grateful thoughts are a central contributor to happiness and wellbeing.

## Step 4. **Support** Your Teen's Development and Success

- Ask key questions to support their skills: *"I know you have a big day planned, and I noticed you took care of yourself by going to bed at 10, instead of staying up late to finish the movie. How are you feeling?"*
- Promote an "I can" belief. Teens need to hear that you believe in their ability to take responsibility.
- Foster friendships.
- Stay engaged. Learning to take responsibility after making a poor choice takes time. Teens ages 15-19 may need your ideas, support, and guidance a number of times since each situation will be unique.
- Follow through on logical consequences to repair harm when needed.

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

No matter how old your teen is, your praise and encouragement are their sweetest reward.

- Notice even small successes: *"I noticed you picked up trash on the neighbor's lawn left by your friends. That's really taking responsibility."*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Promote joy and happiness by laughing, high-fiving, and hugging to appreciate one another.

**Tip** Be specific. "Good job" seems not to carry much meaning. However, a specific compliment about a pointed behavior -- *"You submitted those college applications all on your own. Love seeing that!"* -- can promote more of the same.

**Trap** If you focus only on outcomes -- *"You did well today"* -- you miss the chance to influence the process. Better to say -- *"I noticed you made up with your sister even before I said anything. That's the way to be a caring sister."*

**Trap** Avoid bribes. A bribe is a promise for a behavior, while praise is special attention after the behavior. While bribes may work in the short term, praise grows lasting motivation for good behavior and effort. For example, instead of saying *"If you take care of the dog all week without being asked, you'll get extra game time"* (which is a bribe), try recognizing the behavior after. *"You took care of the dog all week without being asked. I really appreciate that!"*

**Celebrate yourself** for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your teen's success today and in their future!

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