

Responsibility Age 13 Summary

Why Responsibility?

Children/teens ages 11-14 are working on understanding what it means to act responsibly. Making responsible decisions can involve identifying problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, and considering the ethical implications or consequences of choices. Such an important skill takes a lot of planning and practice for a parent or those in a parenting role to teach and many opportunities for a child/teen to try out and redo before it is mastered.

STEP 1  **GET INPUT**

Get Your Child/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 concerns your child/teen most without assuming your child/teen shares your 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 child/teen uncover feelings.

STEP 2  **TEACH**

Teach New Skills

- 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 child/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?”*

- 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/teen to repair harm. When they damage or break an object or hurt a sibling’s feelings, ask them what ideas they have to repair the object and help heal the relationship. Gain your child’s/teen’s input and allow them to decide how to repair harm in each situation.

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



Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Allow your child/teen opportunities to take responsibility for their tasks or relationships -- even when you know you could do it faster or better.
- Proactively remind. *“What do you need to do to prepare for your upcoming test?”*
- Use “Show me...” statements. Say, *“Show me how you are taking responsibility and using the homework strategies you set up to prepare for your test.”*
- Offer limited and possible choices.
- Recognize effort using “I notice...” statements like, *“I notice how you went back to your sister to talk to her after you fought to improve things. 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?” Children/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 well-being.



Support Your Child’s/Teen’s Development and Success

- Ask key questions to support their skills: *“You have your big test today. How are you feeling? Do you feel like the homework strategies you used prepared you well?”*
- Promote an “I can” belief. Children/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. Children/Teens ages 11-14 may need your ideas, support, and guidance several times since each situation will be unique.

- Follow through on logical consequences to repair harm when needed.



Recognize Efforts

No matter how old your child/teen is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.

- You can reinforce your child's/teen's efforts in many ways. It is essential to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three distinct parenting behaviors impact your child's/teen's behavior differently.
 - **Recognize** even small successes to promote positive behaviors and expand confidence: *"You fed the dog all week without being asked. I appreciate that!"* Recognition can include nonverbal acknowledgment such as a smile, high five, or hug.
 - **Rewards** can be helpful in certain situations by providing a concrete, timely, and positive incentive for doing a good job. A reward is determined ahead of time so that the child/teen knows what to expect, like *"If you complete your chores this morning, you will be able to invite a friend over this afternoon"* (if you XX, then I'll XX). The goal should be to help your child/teen progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. Rewards can decrease a child's/teen's intrinsic motivation if used too often.
 - Unlike a reward, bribes aren't planned and generally happen when a parent or those in a parenting role is in a crisis (like a child/teen arguing and refusing to leave a social gathering. To avoid disaster, a parent or those in a parenting role offers to stop for ice cream on the way home if the child/teen will stop arguing and leave the event). While bribes can be helpful in the short term to manage stressful situations, they will not grow lasting motivation or behavior change and should be avoided.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, snuggle together after a smooth bedtime routine and listen to relaxing music. Or, in the morning, once ready for school, leave a special note of gratitude in their lunchbox.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2023). *Responsibility Age 13 Summary*. Retrieved from <https://www.ToolsforYourChildsSuccess.org>

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