

## Responsibility Age 19 Summary

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### Why Responsibility?

Teens ages 15-19 are working on understanding their emerging adult identity and 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 teen to try out and redo before it is mastered.

**STEP 1**  **GET INPUT**

### 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 assuming your 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 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 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 teen to repair harm. When they damage or break an object or hurt a sibling’s feelings, ask what ideas they have to repair the object and help heal the relationship.

**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 teen 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.



### Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Allow your teen opportunities to take responsibility for their 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, you need to check in with me when you get to your friend’s house and be home by the curfew we agreed upon?*”
- 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?” 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 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 ten 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 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 teen is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.

- There are many ways you can reinforce your teen's efforts. It is essential to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three distinct parenting behaviors have different impacts on your teen's behavior.
  - 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 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 teen progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. If used too often, rewards can decrease a teen's intrinsic motivation.
  - 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 teen arguing and refusing to leave a social gathering. To avoid disaster, a parent or those in a parenting role offers to stop for a snack on the way home if the teen stops arguing and leaves 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, after your teen comes home at the agreed-upon time, relax together and listen to some music. Or, in the morning, once ready for school, leave a special note and snack in their backpack.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2023). *Responsibility Age 19 Summary*. Retrieved from <https://www.ToolsforYourChildsSuccess.org>

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