

## Responsibility Age 2 Summary

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### Why Responsibility?

As a parent or someone in a parenting role, you play an essential role in your child's success. There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-child relationship, and working together to make responsible decisions is a great way to do it.

**STEP 1**  **Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input**

- Each time there is an opportunity, ask your child, "How do you feel? How do you think I feel?" For example, if your child is with others who are all tempted to make a less responsible decision - such as wanting to knock down a big tower of blocks that a friend just built - help your child notice their thoughts and reactions and those of the other children. You might even name the expressions and body language you notice.
  - "You and your friends are looking at Stephanie's block tower. You are smiling at the tower but looking to see where Stephanie is. I wonder if you might want to knock over her tower. That is tempting. How will she feel if her tower is knocked down? Do you think we should move away?"
  - You can also help your child make a fence around the block tower to help everyone remember to be careful.
- When reading books, notice when the characters are about to make responsible or irresponsible decisions. Take a moment to pause the story and point out what you notice. "I think it was responsible to take the umbrella when they went to the park. The clouds in the picture look like they might rain."
- If your child is unsure about how others are feeling or buried in their own feelings, help them by sharing what you think others are feeling. You could say, "I wonder if that person is feeling sad because their head is hanging down and their mouth is frowning. Do you think they feel sad?" Or, "I think that person might be angry because their face is red and their eyebrows are scrunched. Do you think they feel angry?"
- Practicing naming feelings will enable your child to identify their own feelings and others and seek support when needed. 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

- 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 responsible choice. Offer support when it’s needed.
- 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 each face’s feelings and practice recreating those cues with your child.
- Share your thoughts and feelings. Talk about what you notice, how you feel, why you feel it, and what signs you give even when uncomfortable. “I see you are playing with all your favorite cars, and I am worried you don’t want to share them with your friend. Do you see that I am pressing my lips together like this? That means I am worried. I will get out some different toys to be easier to share.”
- Talk aloud about how you respond to your big feelings: “It made me feel so much better to tell you how I was feeling and get different toys to share.”
- Develop pride in making responsible choices. In addition to growing these essential skills that lead your child to develop responsibility, there are beliefs and attitudes you can promote to help them, too. For example, when your child uses language that ignores your advice, like “No,” you may respond with:
  - “Sometimes it is difficult, but I know you can do it.”
  - “Do you remember last time when this was hard? You took a deep breath and were able to do it.”
  - “I wonder if we can help each other overcome 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 example, putting their book back on the bookshelf after reading it is a right-sized opportunity to be responsible for two-year-olds. If this is hard, you might offer reminders when you get it off the shelf, such as, “We are getting the book off the shelf now, and then we can put it back later.”
- Talk about responsible decisions when there is no pressure to make one. For example, you can point out how good it feels to find your book waiting in 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 your child 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.



## Support Your Child's Development and Success

- Initially, your child may need active support. Use “Show me...” statements with a positive tone and body language to express excitement and curiosity and ask them to demonstrate how to work hard toward a goal. When a child learns a new skill, they are eager to show it off! “Show me you can make a responsible decision by starting to put your toys away in the basket.”
- Recognize effort using “I notice...” statements like: “I noticed you were uncertain about what to do, and you asked for my help! I love seeing that.”
- On days with extra challenges, when you can see your child is having difficulty making 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 we took a short nap and are late for a snack. Our bodies might be hungry right now. 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 to be having trouble making a decision. Can I help you decide on the next step?”
  - You can also comfort others when facing new challenges. “Would your bear help you feel more confident?”



## Recognize Efforts

- Recognize and call out when things are going well. It may seem obvious, but it’s easy not to notice when everything moves smoothly. Noticing and naming the behavior provides the necessary reinforcement that you see and value your child’s choice.
- Recognize small steps along the way. Don’t wait for significant accomplishments—like the full bedtime routine going smoothly—to recognize effort. Remember that your recognition can work as a tool to promote more positive behaviors. Find small ways your child is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, after you’ve completed your bedtime routine, snuggle and read before bed.

**Trap:** It can be easy to resort to bribes when recognition and occasional rewards are underutilized. If parents or those in a parenting role frequently resort to bribes, it is likely time to revisit the five-step process.

**Trap:** Think about what behavior a bribe may unintentionally reinforce. For example, offering a sucker if a child stops a tantrum in the grocery store checkout line may teach the child that future tantrums lead to additional treats.

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