

## Want responsible kids?

### Create an environment that produces responsibility.

Your behavior as a parent creates the environment that nurtures responsibility in your kids. It's similar to growing plants from seeds -- provide a healthy environment and you will get the healthy fruit you wanted (most of the time).

I imagine you want your kids to be responsible since you would like for them to be able to move out and get off of your payroll one day. I imagine you would also like for them to have responsible relationships and make a real difference in the world.

Below are some ways of parenting and what those parenting styles tend to produce in children. You may find yourself completely in one category, but not likely. More likely, you have some qualities from each. Try to get into that last category. It's the healthiest environment for rearing capable, responsible, contributing children.

<p>When the parent <b>Over-responds or Over-functions</b> it may appear as:</p>	<p>What we might expect to see in a child of these parents</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety over child's performance and/or achievement</li> <li>• Overly-protective</li> <li>• Doing for the child what the child can do for him/herself</li> <li>• Highly directive, intrusive</li> <li>• Rescuing the child from responsibility and consequences</li> <li>• Reminding more than appropriate, preaching, lecturing, nagging</li> <li>• Intolerance of change</li> <li>• Over-insistence on order.</li> <li>• Thinking for the child. Disallows the child's own thoughts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> <li>• Feelings of helplessness, powerlessness</li> <li>• Sees self as incapable</li> <li>• Engages in power struggles</li> <li>• Feels Intimidated</li> <li>• Expects others to do for him/her what he/she can do for him/herself</li> <li>• Blames others</li> <li>• Procrastinates</li> <li>• Dawdles</li> <li>• Makes excuses</li> <li>• Over-dependent</li> <li>• Manipulative</li> <li>• Views parent as martyr</li> <li>• Little understanding of the relationship between effort and reward</li> <li>• Anger</li> </ul>
<p>When a parent is <b>Rigid and Overly Intrusive or Over-controlling</b> it may appear as:</p>	<p>What we might expect to see in a child of these parents</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly anxious</li> <li>• Having a rigid concept of how a task is to be performed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> <li>• Feelings of inadequacy</li> <li>• Experiences repeated failures</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having exceptionally high expectations</li> <li>• Controlling</li> <li>• Thinking for the child</li> <li>• Conditional love</li> <li>• Using shame and guilt as a tool to control</li> <li>• Intolerance of change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of taking risks, sometimes phobic</li> <li>• Fear of rejection</li> <li>• Engaging in power struggles</li> <li>• Experiences of shame about mistakes</li> <li>• Anger</li> </ul>
<p>When a parent sees and treats the child as a <b>Capable and Responsible Individual</b> it may appear as:</p>	<p>What we might expect to see in a child of these parents</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modeling responsible behavior and decision making.</li> <li>• Parent capably managing their own life.</li> <li>• Providing appropriate responsibilities for the child.</li> <li>• Trusting in and enjoying the process of growth in the child and themselves.</li> <li>• Allowing the child to make mistakes.</li> <li>• Assisting the child in learning from mistakes.</li> <li>• Allows the child to experience the consequences of his choices and behaviors</li> <li>• Models new tasks for the child and assists in the initial stage</li> <li>• Allowing the child to do all he/she can do for him/herself, allowing them to stretch their abilities and grow and capability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A developing sense of personal power</li> <li>• Higher self-esteem</li> <li>• Believes him/herself to be a competent individual</li> <li>• Trusts in self and ability to rebound from failures</li> <li>• Resilience</li> <li>• Capable decision-making</li> <li>• Accepts responsibility for own actions</li> <li>• Understands cause/effect relationship</li> <li>• Flexibility to understand that some things “just happen.”</li> <li>• Growing confidence in self and ability to stand ground with peers.</li> <li>• Less concern about opinions of others.</li> </ul>

During their early years, your child is dependent on you for survival and welfare. Gradually, they can naturally become more independent if you allow it. The “terrible twos” is really not so terrible since that is the period where the child begins to assert their desire for independence/autonomy. Sometimes it’s “terrible” because parents disallow appropriate independence. It’s also a time for teaching cause/effect and boundaries.

After that first expression of independence, healthy development calls for the child to spiral out from the parents into greater independence. Developmentally appropriate guidance is needed for decision-making, allowing the child to make and learn from mistakes. Parents who want responsible children will encourage children to create distance between themselves and the parent’s guidance, influence, and control.

As independence grows interdependence can develop. This is where individuals are able to take the initiative to work in a cooperative effort, to work in a group, to maintain appropriately responsible roles in intimacy, and to negotiate with others for common good. It includes appropriate levels of responsibility for self and others.

The process from dependence to independence to interdependence is a gradual process encompassing many years of development. The foundations for responsibility are formed during the preschool and elementary years. After age 12, the foundations for responsibility can be developed, but it is usually a difficult struggle for both child and parent.

Responsibility must be learned by experience. This requires the parent to create an environment for growth and development by:

- Providing developmentally appropriate opportunities for responsibility and decision making
- Providing appropriate feedback (not controlling or judgmental but respectful and helpful in preparation for future decisions).
- Allowing the child to learning from mistakes. This may require helping them work through the happenings to a greater level of understanding.
- Allowing the child to experience the full consequences of their actions or decisions.

Some tips:

- Focus your parenting on the long-term development and maturity of the child. You are working to teach them independence, competence, cooperation, choice/consequence relationship, achievement of personal goals, and to be their own person. See tasks such as doing chores as a means to teaching these things versus an end in themselves.
- Start as soon and start small. Toddlers can do little tasks and make simple choices that relate to self and others.
- Use reasonable time limits to assist in teaching responsibility. Work on a task will expand to take up the time allotted. When developmentally appropriate, begin to help the child set time limits. We are not talking about rushing here but we are talking about avoiding foot-dragging and procrastination. Help them consider the pace of their schedule and make time to be a kid.
- Be consistent with expectations, follow-through, and associated consequences for not meeting the standard.
- Be sure all care-givers (daycare and relatives) work with you to create a consistent unified approach.
- Allow the child to have their own appropriate boundaries. Discipline yourself to honor those boundaries. If you don't know what they are, it may be time for some communication. Expect the child to honor your boundaries as well.

Some helpful books:

Eyre, L. a. E., R. (2010). Teaching children responsibility. Salt Lake City, UT, Deseret.

Glenn, H. S., Nelsen, J. (2010). Raising self-reliant children in a self-indulgent world. New York, Random House.

McKay, G. D. a. D., D. (1996). Raising a responsible child: How to prepare your child for today's complex world. New York, Fireside.