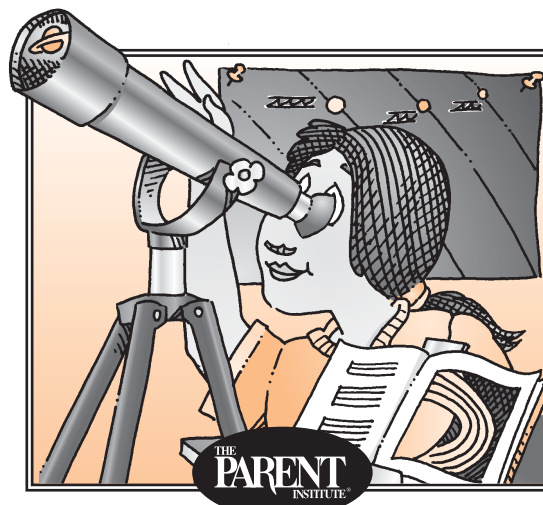


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TEACHING CHILDREN RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR LEARNING & BEHAVIOR

Ways Parents Can Help Their Children
Do Better in School

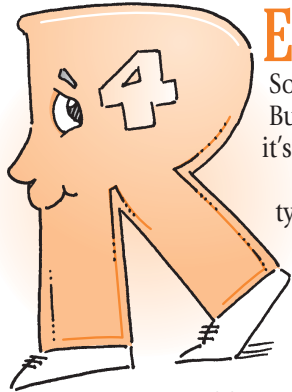


THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE

One of a Series of Booklets for Parents

T H E • D I S C I P L I N E • S E R I E S

The Fourth 'R' for School Success is Responsibility



Every parent knows the importance of the three "Rs": reading, writing and arithmetic. Some call them the basics of a good education. But there's a fourth "R"—Responsibility—and it's also basic to learning.

Well-disciplined students take responsibility for their own learning and behavior at home and at school. They don't have to be nagged about doing their homework or attending school—because they are self-motivated and self-directed.

Well-disciplined students don't make excuses or blame others for their problems. They make good choices about what to do and when to do it. They are conscientious and resourceful—and they don't quit easily.

But none of this is inborn. Taking responsibility for one's actions is an important step in becoming self-disciplined—and it must be learned. Because parents are a child's most influential teachers, the very best place for children to learn to take responsibility for their own learning and behavior is right at home.

This booklet is full of ideas to help you nurture your child's desire and ability to take responsibility for being a good student.

Tip: Don't expect to put all the ideas in this booklet into practice right away. The best way to make changes is one step at a time. Focus on one or two ideas at a time—and don't forget to celebrate progress!



Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun. We'll alternate using "he/him" and "she/her" throughout this booklet.

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STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY QUIZ:

Do I Take Responsibility for My Learning and Behavior?

Have your child take this responsibility quiz. Have her answer each item with *yes* or *no*.

1. I regularly set goals for things I want to accomplish.
2. I manage my time and I set priorities to make sure I do the important things first.
3. I keep track of my school assignments and I have a daily study plan.
4. I have a step-by-step method of studying for tests.
5. I know how to find the main ideas in what I read.
6. I have all the "tools" I need when I do my schoolwork—dictionary, pencils, pens, paper, scissors, thesaurus, etc.
7. I make sure I'm ready for the next day before I go to bed.
8. I spend at least as much time reading for fun as I spend watching TV.
9. I have a regular process that I use to solve problems.
10. I listen well in class and follow directions carefully.
11. I get along well with teachers and other students, and I know how to resolve conflicts peacefully.
12. I know that I am responsible for what I do and that I must accept the consequences of my behavior.
13. I know my parents' expectations about such things as school attendance, grades, chores, honesty, use of drugs and alcohol.



How did your child do?

Seven or more *yes* answers is very good. Five is average. Fewer than three *yes* answers indicates real improvement is needed. Talk with your child about how she did, then look for ideas in this booklet for ways to help her improve.

Responsible Students Set Goals for Themselves

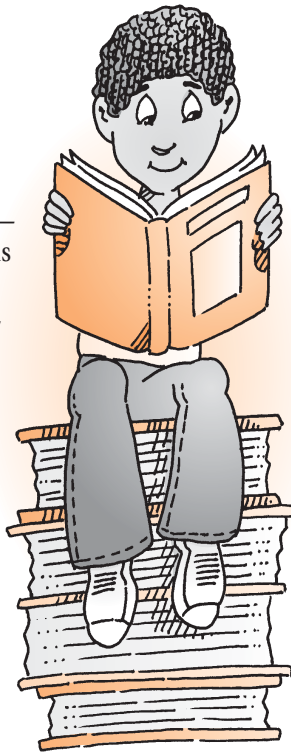
Goals help children focus on what's important and what's not. When children are goal-oriented, they are more likely to say *no* to irresponsible behaviors—because they are saying *yes* to their visions of the future.

Children can set goals for schoolwork, getting along with others, sports and leisure activities, or anything else they want to improve.

Teach Goal-Setting

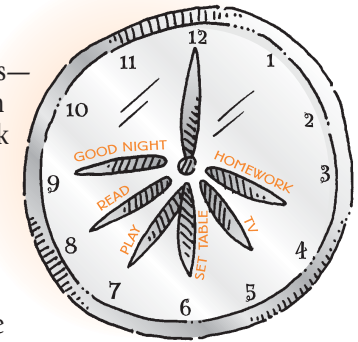
Take these steps to help your child set goals and achieve them:

1. **At the beginning of the week**, help your child identify one goal. It might be turning in a book report on time. It may be getting 90 percent correct on a spelling test.
2. **Have your child write the goal** on a piece of paper. Post it on the refrigerator or a bulletin board.
3. **Talk about how to accomplish the goal.** Help your child break the goal down into smaller steps. For example, "You could read two chapters every day. Then you can spend a day writing your report and another day revising it."
4. **Ask how things are going** as the week progresses. If problems come up, talk about possible solutions. If your child falls behind in reading, for example, a 10-minute extension of bedtime might help him catch up.
5. **At the end of the week**, help your child evaluate how well he did. Did he achieve his goals? Why or why not? Most importantly, praise your child for trying. Then help him set a new goal for next week.



Responsible Students Learn To Plan Their Time

Responsible people meet their obligations—whether it's turning in schoolwork when it's due or having a report on the boss's desk when it's needed. But it takes planning.



Use a Time Log

A common excuse children use for not doing what they need to do is, "I don't have enough time!"

The fact is: They have time. They just need to learn to use it wisely. To do that, they need to see where their time goes now.

For one full week, have your child write down what she is doing every 15 minutes. At the end of the week, talk about what she has learned about how her time is really being spent.

Set a Daily Schedule ...

Many children are natural procrastinators. They put things off until the last possible minute, or they don't do them at all.

Help your child make a daily schedule of what needs to be done—and by a reasonable hour.

... or a Weekly Schedule

The daily schedule can also be expanded to a weekly schedule. All that's needed is a sheet of paper. Make a heading for each day of the week. Then fill in the times and the various activities.


Keep a Schedule for 21 Days and It'll Be a Habit

Keeping a daily schedule can become one of the most helpful habits your child can have. Experts say if a child keeps a schedule for just 21 days, it will likely become a habit for many years.

Students Need a Study Plan & Ways to Track Assignments

One of the best ways to help your child be responsible and keep track of school assignments is to have him use an assignment book or chart. Have him record assignments daily. Each night, you can review and initial them. Your child can make his own assignment sheets, like this:

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT SHEET FOR: <u>MONDAY</u>			
Subject	Assignment	Completed	Parent's Initials
Math			
English			
Social Studies			
Science			



Develop a Study Plan

Like anything else, children study better if they have a plan. Talk with your child and make plans together about:

- **When he should study each day.** (Studying should be an *everyday* habit. If there is no assignment, he can review.)
- **How long he should study.**
- **Where he should study.**
- **What subjects he should study first, second, third, etc.**

Track Long-Term Assignments

Most children have trouble managing homework assignments that require several weeks to complete. Help your child use a calendar to budget his time.

First show him how to break the job down into small steps. Next, help him plan how much time each step will take. Then have him mark the due date for each step on his calendar.

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Step-by-Step Method Helps Students Study for Tests

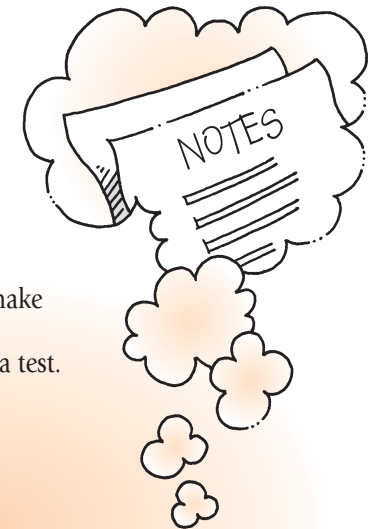
Help your child learn that the “secret” of studying for tests is first having a good plan for studying every day—and then doing a self-test review a few days before the exam.

Do a Self-Test Review

After becoming familiar with the subject through daily study, all your child needs to do before a test is a self-test review.

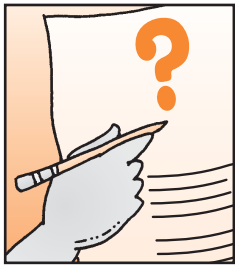
Help your child:

- **Make up test questions** she would ask if she were the teacher.
- **Try to answer her own questions** to see what she needs to study.
- **Review her notes,** handouts, textbooks and learning objectives.
- **Relate things she needs to learn** to things she already knows.
- **Memorize facts and formulas.** Help her make memorizing a game.
- **Get a good night's sleep** the night before a test.



Students Can Learn to Find Main Ideas When They Read

Your child is responsible for understanding what he reads. One of the best ways to help your child find the meaning in reading material is to have him *consciously look for the main idea*. As he reads, he should ask himself:



What's the Big Idea Here?

"What is the main idea of this paragraph?"

"What is this page about?"

"What is the point of this chapter?"

Just keeping those questions in mind will help him find the answers. It makes him think about the information. It helps him compare it to what he already knows. The result is better understanding.

Take Notes

For many kids, just reading the material isn't enough. Note-taking can help students find and remember the main idea of a reading assignment. Have your child:

- **Write down just the important points.** These are often found in the introduction, headings, words in boldface and the summary.
- **Include key details.** Jot down the most important facts the author gives to support his arguments.
- **Create study flash cards.** As your child reads, have him write a question or key word on the front of each card. Then have him write the answer or definition on the back.

Explain the Main Ideas

After consciously looking for the "big ideas" in the reading material and taking notes as he reads, another good idea is to have your child tell you or someone else what the main ideas were. There's something almost magical about *planning* to explain the ideas to another person and then *doing it*.

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A Craftsman Can't Work Without the Right Tools

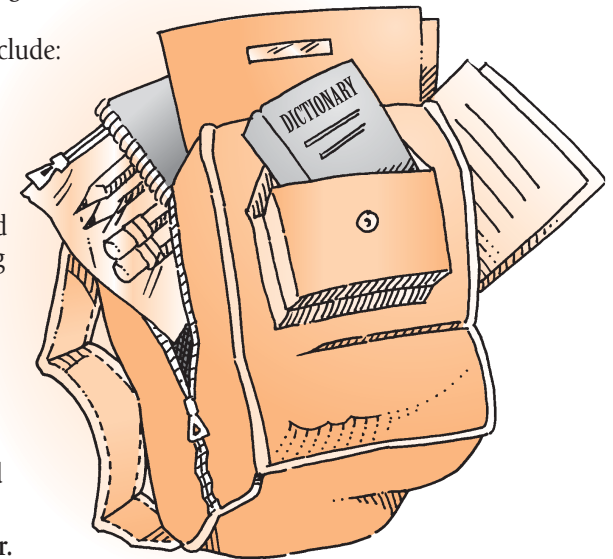
Just like all workers, your child needs to be properly "equipped" to do her job—both at home and at school. Being prepared for class tells the teacher she's responsible and serious about learning.

Create a Schoolwork Survival Kit

A schoolwork survival kit contains everything a child needs to make studying and learning easier.

A typical kit should fit in a backpack. It might include:

- A plastic pouch for keeping pens, pencils, erasers, calculators and other school supplies.
- A folder with front and back pockets for storing important papers.
- Extra notebook paper.
- A list of important phone numbers and email addresses.
- A small dictionary and thesaurus.
- An assignment planner.



For many students, the tools and accessories of learning can actually make learning more fun and effective. Giving your child a few dollars to spend in an office supply store on tools to help her learn can be a good investment. A special pen, ruler, highlighter or note pad may give learning a whole new look.

Responsible Students Are Ready Ahead of Time



You can help your child learn that being late or forgetting something doesn't just happen—it is a choice he makes. Responsible children learn to make responsible choices.

Your child can choose to avoid morning “crazy time” and other crises. Teach him to take five or 10 minutes before bedtime to get ready for the next day: Get homework papers signed. Pack the backpack. Make lunch. Lay out clothes. Then have him get up early enough to eat a good breakfast.

Cardboard Boxes Save the Day

A cardboard box big enough to hold everything your child takes to school each day can help him learn to be more responsible. Have your child choose a place for his box. Every afternoon, his first task is to place all belongings in the box. When his homework is finished, it goes in the box, too. In the morning, the box is his last stop before heading out the door.

Successful Students Read as Much as They Watch TV

Research shows that children who spend more than 10 hours a week in front of the television do not read as well as those whose parents set TV limits. These steps will encourage your child to spend more time reading:

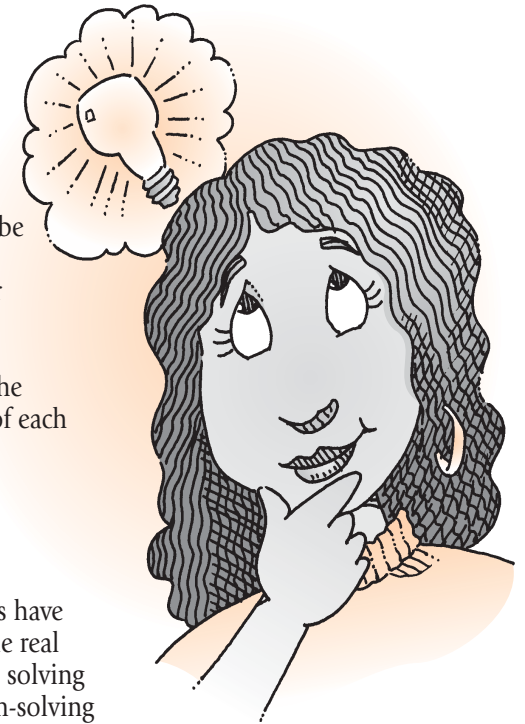
- **Track TV time.** Have your child keep track of how much time he spends watching TV. You may help him realize he can afford to spend a lot less time watching TV and more time reading.
- **Be a reading role model.** Make sure your child sees you reading and hears you talking about books.
- **Challenge your child**—for a week—to read at least as much as he watches TV.
- **Help your child find interesting books.** Identify your child's interests, then help him find books and magazines on those topics, and you'll have an avid reader! Your library or bookstore can help your child find materials on any topic.

Responsible Students Use A Problem-Solving Process

It's natural to want to solve your child's problems. But that won't help her learn the discipline of responsible decision-making.

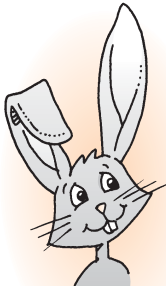
Here are five useful steps you can teach your child to take when she faces a problem:

1. **Decide what the problem is.** Summarize it in just a few words.
2. **Generate several possible solutions.** Ask, “What might be done to solve this problem?” Older children can write their ideas down.
3. **Evaluate the solutions.** List the positive and negative effects of each possible solution.
4. **Decide on a solution.**
5. **Develop a plan to make the solution work!** Few problems have just one possible solution. The real secret to responsible problem solving is to have her use the problem-solving process to make the best decision she can—and then MAKE IT WORK!



Help your child consider what should be done first, second and third. The problem won't be solved until your child puts her plan into action.

Listening Well & Following Directions Are Key Skills



Children who don't pay attention in school can't learn. Here's an activity to help your child improve his ability to listen, understand and follow directions more carefully:

Practice 'Active Listening' Together

When children understand the directions they are given, they are better able to follow them. Practice this process at home when giving your child directions:

- **Take turns speaking.** Only one person can talk at a time. The first speaker talks about something. The other listens.
- **Focus on the speaker.** Look at him. Nod your head. Concentrate on what he is saying.
- **Summarize what the speaker just said.** When the first speaker is finished, the listener must summarize what was said *before he can speak!*

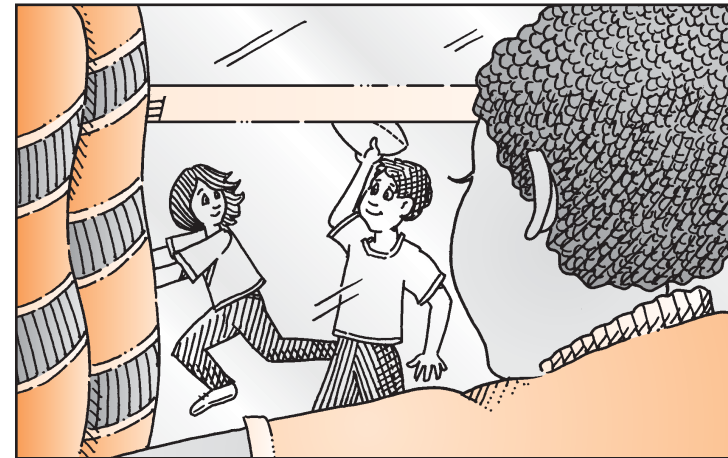
Responsible Students Get Along Well With Others

Many of children's school problems are social ones. Often, children don't take responsibility for getting along because they don't know how.

Teach your child this three-step process for resolving personal conflicts. When she gets angry with someone, tell her to say:

1. **Why did you do that?** Asking others the reasons for their actions helps open dialogue. It gives room for them to say, "I didn't realize ..." or "I'm sorry." Or they can explain their motives.
2. **When you did that, I felt ...** This helps a child identify her feelings. It helps the other person see that her actions have impact.
3. **I would feel better if ...** "This is a critical step because it requires a child to think in advance about what will help resolve the situation," says one teacher who teaches this process. "A conflict is much easier to resolve when at least one of the parties has an idea or two for improvements."

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Responsibility Means Accepting Consequences

A responsible child understands that his actions have consequences. You can help your child take responsibility for what he does by not letting him "off the hook."

Don't let your child make excuses for his behavior. Talk about how choices have consequences, and let him "suffer" the consequences of his actions. If he forgets his homework at home, for example, don't offer to drive it to school for him. Say, "I'm sorry, but actions have consequences. You'll have to tell your teacher you left it at home." Also, set consequences at home for inappropriate behavior at school. A child who gets in a fight at school may not be allowed to play with friends that week.

To be effective, a consequence should meet three criteria:

1. **Is it logically related** to the misbehavior? (Children need to see the connection.)
2. **Is its enforcement respectful** of your child?
3. **Is it reasonable to you and your child?**

As with all discipline techniques, the consequences must be consistently enforced—every time—or they accomplish little.

Students Need to Know What Their Parents Expect

Despite what children sometimes say, they need and want limits. That's why family rules and expectations are so important—and only parents can set them.

Develop Rules That Work

While no one but you can make the rules for home behavior, it is important for children to be involved. Getting children's suggestions helps them feel that their views have been heard—and makes it more likely that they will follow the rules.

Talk about specific family rules you would like to make. After getting your children's ideas, decide on the final rules and explain them. Together, write them on a sheet of paper and put it up for all to see.



Talk About Your Expectations

Children want to please their parents and do their best to live up to their parents' expectations. But do your children know what your expectations are?

Parents communicate expectations to children in many ways—by what they say, how they act and how they react to others. Think about what you expect of your children on subjects like the grades they should be making in school, how much they should be reading, how they should cooperate with teachers. Talk with your children about your expectations often.

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A Final Word

It may take a lot of effort to get a child on track—to teach her to take responsibility for her learning and behavior. But it will pay off.

Teaching your child such things as how to study, how to organize time, how to solve problems and how to get along with others can help her become more responsible.

As your child becomes a self-confident, independent learner, you will have met one of your most important responsibilities. You will have taught your child the attitudes and skills she needs to grow into a responsible and capable adult.



Teaching Children Responsibility for Their Learning & Behavior is one of eight titles in "The Discipline Series" of booklets for parents published by The Parent Institute®, P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474. Call (800) 756-5525.

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