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Developing responsibility in children

CONSTANCE FOSTER

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Developing responsibility in children

by Constance J. Foster

Author, with O. Spurgeon English, M.D., of *Fathers Are Parents, Too — A Constructive Guide to Successful Fatherhood*

ILLUSTRATED BY JEANNE DOERN

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Deacidified

1

What is responsibility?

If you were to write down the characteristics of a "responsible" person, you could compile an endless list. Probably you'd say a responsible person:

- Cares about and respects himself and others.
- Wants to carry his share of the load, to meet obligations, to be on his own and not cause anyone any unnecessary trouble.
- Has a sense of personal worth. He holds himself accountable for his own thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- Doesn't expect something for nothing out of life.
- Is a good worker, good parent, good mate, and good neighbor.

Responsibility, as you can see, includes many different characteristics. Why should parents and teachers want children to develop these characteristics, to grow up to be responsible individuals?

To many people, the person with a sense of responsibility seems overly serious and leans a little to the grim, burden-of-the-world-on-my-shoulders kind of personality. The irresponsible person, on the other hand, is often pictured as gay and fun-loving, such a joy to observe and be with that people are inclined to forgive him for his irresponsibility.

We know better

Studies by leading psychologists and sociologists have shown that these ideas about responsibility are erroneous. The happy, well-adjusted person is the one with a well-balanced sense of responsibility—toward himself and toward others. And the irresponsible person is likely to be unsure of himself and the world around him, and so self-centered that he can never really give love to others and enjoy the satisfactions derived from love.

Moreover, studies have shown, the irresponsible, unhappy, self-centered

individuals are the ones who do not fit in with our democratic way of life—because they are unwilling to carry their share of the load, because they do not respect the rights of others, and because they are concerned only with their own desires and interests.

Happy, well-adjusted people are generally the most responsible individuals.

It is obvious why, as parents and teachers, we want our children to develop into responsible adults.

Responsibility has to be learned

But children are not *born* responsible. They have to learn responsibility—cooperativeness, consideration for others, good manners—just as they learn to walk and to talk. And the process of learning to be a responsible individual starts much earlier than most people think. It starts the moment a child is born. Children don't develop responsibility by themselves, accidentally or suddenly.

The infant learns something of responsibility from the care and treatment given him by the adults around him. And children in their late teens are *still* learning responsibility. Parents, nursery school teachers, grade school and high school teachers all have a share in helping children develop this all-important sense of responsibility.

Child study experts have found that the very young child begins to learn responsibility *by having all his needs fully taken care of for him*—which is the very opposite of being responsible.

A child learns to be responsible by first having been irresponsible! Responsibility really amounts to *giving* or sharing of oneself. And a person is more likely to share when someone has shared with him. For example, a child is more likely to offer his bag of cookies to his playmates if they have shared their treats with him than if they have consistently failed to do so.

A human being learns to be considerate and giving toward others through first having others act considerate and thoughtful toward him.

Numerous studies, including one by Pitirim A. Sorokin, the noted sociologist, show that being reared by loving, giving parents is most important in helping children become cooperative and responsible.

In his survey, Professor Sorokin studied adults, college students, and nursery school children. In almost all cases the happiest, best-liked, and most responsible individuals came from happy homes and loving, harmonious families.

None of the groups studied was especially wealthy or had great material advantage over others. The one thing they had in common, however, was loving, understanding parents.

Love does it

It may not seem that a parent is teaching responsibility to a child by just loving and caring for him—kissing and cuddling him, changing his diapers, supplying him with food and warmth, being patient, protecting him from fear and hurt and rage. But this kind of care is the foundation on which all future responsible behavior is built.

To be genuinely responsible, first in small ways and later in big ones, a tremendous reservoir of good, loving feelings down deep inside the child is necessary. The child learns to be loving from first having had loving care.

Truly responsible people are always basically loving people. Hostile, hurt, angry, embittered people are usually much too engrossed in their own feelings to be able to assume genuine responsibility for themselves or others. And children are oriented toward love, or its opposite, in the first few years of life.

The "show 'em who's boss" approach

Six-month-old Billy is hungry and wet. His mother hears him wailing, but decides she'll finish waxing the floor before heating his bottle, feed-

ing, and changing him. She feels that it's good for a child to wait for what he wants. "That's how you get a schedule established. You have to start training them young. Otherwise they get spoiled, and use crying as a weapon to get everything they want."

Not until Billy's crying has "gotten on her nerves" does she go to him. By this time Billy has cried himself into such an emotional state that he's no longer interested in food. He takes just a few ounces of his bottle and does a lot of coughing and spitting. His mother decides to treat this "tantrum" firmly. While he is being changed, there is no cooing and playing; and there's no kiss when he is put back in his crib for his nap. It's been rather an unhappy time for both Billy and his mother.

It's a good thing we love them

On the other hand, there's Jeff, a few months older than Billy. He and his mother made a long train trip to see his soldier father in a Southern camp. Between trains, Jeff's mother was feeding him in a depot restaurant. The meal wasn't going too well. Jeff was cranky after his long confinement in the train. He alternately cried and played with his food.

Though she knew the excitement of traveling and the strange surroundings had upset him, his mother persisted in trying to feed him because she didn't know whether she could get proper foods for him on the train. Finally, Jeff snatched up a bowl of spinach and upset it.

His mother wiped up the mess as well as she could, cleaned his hands and face, and lifted him out of his high chair. Then she kissed him.

"Honey," she said with as much warmth as she could muster, "It's a good thing I love you so much."

It is easy to see what effects continued incidents like these will have on each of the children. Billy, forced to endure discomforts, to stay wet and hungry, to be deprived of love and warmth from his mother without understanding what he has done wrong, is likely to develop a feeling that the world is unfriendly and cold to his interests.

Jeff, whose mother tries to understand how hard it can be sometimes to be little and helpless in a demanding world, is likely to develop the feeling that the world is a pretty good place; that he's safe, being looked after, and loved. Jeff, loved and cared for and understood, will grow up able to care for others and to assume responsibility.

As Jeff's mother said, it is a good thing we love children so much—good for them, good for the world, good for us. For it is only against the background of love that we can ever hope to teach responsibility.

RULES OF THUMB

- Be sure your child feels loved, welcome, and important to you.
- Don't be afraid that kindness and consideration will spoil a child.
- Handle him gently and speak softly to him.
- Gratify his needs for food, affection, and physical comfort as quickly as possible.
- Do things his way at first, so that later he will want to try things your way.
- Keep restraints and expectations at a minimum in the first months. Later he will be all the better able to accept and meet your expectations.

2

Timing is important

There are times, in the long span from birth to adulthood, when it is easier to teach responsibility than at other times. These are "optimum" periods.

Parents and teachers who are aware of these favorable periods and take advantage of them help their children to progress faster toward responsibility. If the most favorable times for teaching are missed or ignored, children may find it more difficult to learn responsibility.

Opportune times

While it is true that developing responsibility is a long-range job, not achieved all at once, it's a mistake to put off starting. For the opportune time for teaching a child responsibility is *when the child, no matter what age, first shows signs of willingness and readiness to do things for himself.*

In short, there is no special age at which to start teaching a child responsibility. Parents and teachers should encourage responsibility whenever and wherever the child seems ready to assume it, even if it's just a matter of letting a baby lift his own arm so his shirt can be put on more easily. A smile or word of approval from the mother for this little action can well be the baby's first lesson in being cooperative and responsible!

Have you ever heard a mother say, "Ruthie's only 3. I have all the time in the world to teach her to cooperate and be reliable"?

Or a teacher say, "I don't expect my first-graders to be disciplined and orderly. They'll straighten out later on. Third or fourth grade is the time to start teaching that"?

But very young children *are* ready for many small lessons in responsibility. Without pushing these youngsters beyond their abilities and physical capacities, parents and teachers can help them develop a sense of self-

sufficiency and capability. It is largely a matter of recognizing the child's readiness and desire to be more responsible, and then helping him and encouraging him.

Off the bottle

Perhaps the very first opportune time for teaching responsibility is when the baby indicates that he is ready to be weaned from the bottle. Although some babies never seem to go through a phase when they clearly do not enjoy the bottle any more, many babies suddenly lose interest in their bottles and want to drink from a cup or take all their foods in solid form.

When a baby wants to drink from a cup, he's making a bid for responsibility.

Weaning is easiest at this time. The baby can be taken off the bottle completely without much fuss or upset. If this opportunity is missed, however, and the baby given no other alternative but to drink from the bottle, he may develop a strong attachment for it. He may insist on so many bottles that he loses his appetite for solid foods, and he may stay on the bottle for longer than desirable. The ultimate weaning period may be a hectic and difficult one for both baby and mother.

Timing toilet training

Understandably, mothers are often anxious to get their children to take over responsibility for their own toilet needs as soon as possible. But toilet

training also has its opportune or most favorable time. Only this "time" occurs several times each day. As most parents know, one of the best ways to start toilet training a youngster is to "see that he's in the right place at the right time." In other words, if the mother can place the baby on the toilet when he is ready to have a movement, he soon learns the relationship that exists between having a movement and the bathroom.

Of course, it's not advisable to swoop up a child and rush him into the bathroom when you detect that he is having or is about to have a movement. That makes the whole business urgent, and makes "accidents" seem too important. But on the other hand, it does no good either to place a child on the toilet when he doesn't have to use it. It's a matter of timing.

There is, however, another aspect of timing in toilet training. Before the age of about 2, most children have not developed sufficiently physically to be able to control their bowel movements to any extent. Bowel movements are almost entirely an automatic process controlled by pressure on certain nerves and muscles.

Since in some cases the experience of being put on a toilet is emotionally upsetting to the child—and since toilet training in its true sense cannot be effective until the age of 2 or older—many experts advise against such training earlier than 2 or 2½.

Self-feeding

Another favorable time for teaching responsibility arises when the child, usually around the age of 15 months, makes his first attempt to feed himself.

Not only does the baby enjoy toying with his food and sometimes even getting some of it into his mouth, but he also gets a start toward caring for his own needs—an important part of being a responsible person.

It's a mistake to discourage the child's first efforts to feed himself, on the basis that "It takes him too long," "He makes too much of a mess," "It wastes food," or "He just wants to play, anyhow." If baby's attempts to take the spoon or cup are foiled as his mother says, "Let's wait a while, Buster, until you can handle a spoon better," a favorable time for developing responsibility passes. The mother who says "wait" to her 2-year-old may still be feeding her 5-year-old by spoon when he comes home from kindergarten for lunch!

Helping with housework

At 3 or so, most children take an interest in how Mother cooks and washes clothes and cleans the house. Little boys and girls follow their

mothers around and try to help out with the housework. Here is another favorable time for teaching responsibility. For though the child slows up the process of getting the house in shape and gets under foot, his intentions are the best, and he should be encouraged and made to feel useful. In this way he develops a healthy attitude toward doing his share of work around the house.

Making a youngster feel useful encourages a healthy attitude toward work.

Some mothers, however, snuff out the desire of a child to help and cooperate. "Please, Johnny, I'm in a hurry and I'll get through a lot faster if I sweep the rug myself. You go out and play in the yard with your wagon like a good boy so I can finish up." (Johnny, of course, was trying to be a "good boy" by helping run the sweeper.) There may never be a time as favorable as this for making Johnny take an interest in and assume some responsibility for a clean and neat house. Even putting his own things away may not make much sense to Johnny, since his mother has made it clear she can get the house in order more quickly without his help.

"Me do, me do"

One of the favorite expressions of the 3-year-old is "*Me* do." When he is being washed or dressed or undressed, he fights to do it himself. Here again is a favorable time for developing responsibility. Though

the 3-year-old usually cannot match the proper button with the corresponding hole and cannot solve the mystery of how a shoelace is tied, his efforts to dress and look after himself are indications of growing independence and responsibility.

Many mothers, however, only see that the youngster's efforts to look after himself end up in her having to do it after all. "Here, let me do it for you. Breakfast is getting cold and you're putting that shoe on the wrong foot." "No, you can't wash yourself. Last time you wasted practically a whole bar of soap, and you dirtied one of my best towels." Many mothers who have said this to their 3- and 4-year-olds are still dressing and bathing their 7-, 8-, and 9-year-olds!

No time like the present

When parents pass up these opportune times for teaching a child to look after his own needs—to develop greater responsibility—the child may begin to find it rather pleasant to have others look after and take care of him. Or he may simply accept this state of affairs as a matter of course. Never having been encouraged to discover the joy of cooperation, to develop initiative, or to assume obligations, he has no "feeling" for these things. He isn't interested in taking responsibility for his playthings, for keeping his clothes and possessions in order, for doing his homework or getting to school on time—because favorable times for teaching him these things were passed by. And he has come to take it for granted that others will assume these responsibilities for him.

Whether a youngster is 1 or 2 or 3, he should be given responsibility as he is ready for it—for dressing and caring for himself, for looking after his own possessions, for doing small tasks around the house. This is how a healthy attitude toward doing one's part is learned.

The grade school years

Just as there are favorable times in the lives of preschoolers—when they themselves indicate that they are ready for greater responsibility—there are times when older children, too, indicate they are able to assume more responsibility.

Because each child matures at a different rate, it's hard to say when a particular child is "ready" for a particular responsibility. It's best to take cues from the youngster's own behavior.

Some time during the grade school years, most girls, for example, will want to cook a meal for the whole family. Nine- and 10-year-old boys may want to try their hand at fixing a screen door or making some pantry

shelves. These are good opportunities for giving youngsters more responsibility and shouldn't be passed up. Of course, excessive ambition on the part of the child may have to be modified—but without dampening his enthusiasm or injuring his self-esteem.

Older boys and girls will want to take on more grown-up responsibilities.

One mother who doubted that her 9-year-old girl could actually prepare a meal that would be edible, and who had some hesitation about letting her handle knives and hot pots, managed to plan a meal which the child could serve to the family all by herself. It was a picnic-type supper—cole slaw, cold cuts, potato salad, iced tea—which the girl could handle safely and which the family thoroughly enjoyed. Although the meal really involved no cooking, the child was happy to have had the responsibility of having the kitchen all to herself for one evening.

Similarly, when a young boy wants to tackle some handy-man job on his own, he should be encouraged to take the responsibility. One 10-year-old who volunteered to fix a flat on the car on Sunday morning was told by his father: "Better let me handle the jack, Al. It's a temperamental old cuss that only I understand. But you can take off the hub cap and loosen the lugs. That'll be a big help."

Doing things independently

Many favorable times for teaching responsibility occur during the grade school years as youngsters start to do things independently, without

adult supervision. For example, between the ages of 8 and 11, most youngsters will ask if they can go to a baseball game, to the Y, to the shopping center, or to the public swimming pool, with another friend and without adult supervision. Perhaps we have forgotten what a big event our first evening show or unsupervised ride on a bus or streetcar was to us! But to every youngster, these experiences are feathers in his hat, signs of maturity and independence.

It's all too easy to say *no* flatly to requests like these. "Eddie, there are going to be 20,000 people at that ball game. The streetcars and buses will be mobbed. I can't let you go alone. You'd be squashed flat as a pancake. Maybe I'll take you next Sunday." Actually, most ball fields have a pretty good record of safety, and the average 10-year-old boy has a knack of being able to go through crowds with the ease of a greased pig. As a general rule, grade-schoolers can handle themselves quite adequately in public places, and should be permitted to do things independently, especially if they will be in a group or if others their own age are allowed the same freedoms.

Even when parents seriously doubt that the youngster is ready to be on his own in a particular situation or when they feel that there is a possible danger involved, it's a good idea to try to avoid a flat veto. For example, if a parent does not feel her 9-year-old should go to the movies at night because several youngsters had been molested, perhaps the youngster can go by herself while it's still light outside and then her mother and father can meet her to take her home.

Children who are allowed to be responsible and independent develop self-confidence about meeting new and difficult situations. When parents are overly cautious about permitting the child to handle new circumstances, the youngster may grow up shy and insecure about anything involving the untried and unfamiliar. "I wish Arthur wouldn't sit around and wait to be asked to do things. Why can't he go out to a show or join one of those clubs at the Y or go roller skating or something?" said the father of a 15-year-old boy. He's the same father who didn't allow his boy to do things independently when he was 9 and 10 years old and *wanted* to do things on his own! Arthur's father had timed his teaching of responsibility entirely according to his own ideas of "readiness" instead of taking his cues from his son.

During the teens

In teen-age, timing continues to be important in teaching responsibility. Unlike Arthur, most teen-agers don't seem the least bit in need of encouragement to take on more individual freedom and responsibility. They can't

get enough of it! They want to regulate their own hours and the amount of time they spend on homework. They want to pick their own friends, choose their own clothes, spend their allowances as they wish, do what they want during summer vacations.

Letting teen-agers make their own decisions helps them become more mature.

But independence and willingness to make decisions are only part of responsibility. Responsibility is also a matter of respect for others, not causing others undue hurt, not acting in a way detrimental to oneself or to society.

Timing the teaching of responsibility in teen-age is largely a matter of teaching the youngster to think of his future responsibilities as adult, husband or wife, wage earner, parent. Problems that we associate with teen-agers—thoughtless dating behavior, reckless driving, perhaps drinking—all involve lack of responsibility. It's the job of parents and teachers to be alert for favorable occasions to discuss these problems with teen-agers.

This does not mean that parents and teachers need to be preachy, blue-noses, or kill-joys. Adults must have confidence and faith in teen-agers, and make opportunities for them to have plenty of adventure, romance, and experience. For the teens are the time for this. Many people in their 20's and 30's who have a hard time "settling down" are simply searching for some of the fun and good times they, for some reason, missed out on when they were teen-agers. But it is important that we take advantage of every opportunity to let teen-agers know that we consider them sensible, reasonable people who believe in moderation and who eventually will hold down

jobs, marry, and be a credit to their families, their communities, and themselves.

Probably the best time to teach responsibility in the teens is when you're saying *yes* to a youngster. For example, when 16-year-old Stuart asks his father for use of the car for the first time, his father can say, "Sure thing, Stu, no reason why not. I know you're a good driver—taught you myself. Just one thing, though, and I hardly have to mention this because I know you have good sense: No hot-rodding or cowboying. Our highways and cars just aren't built for the kind of speed some of the boys drive at."

When 15-year-old Wanda asks her mother if it is all right to accept a date (her first), her mother would be wise to say: "Yes, of course, dear. I've been expecting the boys to get around to asking you for some time now. I suspect you're going to be very popular shortly. Sit down and let's talk about this whole business of dating." Very easily, the whole question of how frequently Wanda may date, the hours she is to come home, and other pertinent dating restrictions can be settled, much more easily because all the restrictions are preceded with a *yes.*

Interest creates opportunities

Another favorable time for teaching responsibility in the teens is when a youngster shows a new or heightened interest in some activity. Gil came home from electric shop at school, full of enthusiasm. "Dad," he said, "I can make an electric eye that'll open the garage door as soon as you drive up in the car. No kidding, there's nothing to it. All you have to do is get one of these photoelectric cells . . ."

Gil's father encouraged him to try out some of his newly acquired knowledge around the house. And on Sundays he and Gil worked together, planning new projects and using the father's power tools to carry them out.

Gil, never very interested in looking ahead to the future, now found himself thinking about a career as an electrician. With the help of his shop teacher and counselor, he started an all-out campaign to find out more about the field.

Similarly, clubs, Scouts, church groups, and other supervised groups help promote a sense of responsibility among teen-agers.

Almost any subject—from woodlore to basketball to selective service—can lead naturally to a discussion of the responsibilities of the young person today. In fact, many young people, given a chance to settle down and talk for a while, welcome the opportunity to bring up this subject themselves. If parents and teachers could take part in or at least eavesdrop on some of the "bull sessions" of teen-agers, they'd find that a lot of good

serious thinking goes on among these boys and girls—plenty of the stuff that responsibility is made of. Parents and teachers can do much to help direct this thinking into constructive channels.

It's never too late

We've talked a lot about favorable times for teaching responsibility. But suppose you've let these most favorable times slip by? The wonderful thing about children—and in fact people in general—is that they are always "improvable." There's hardly a time that you don't have another chance with them. If you've made errors in timing, it's best to just face the fact, and then go ahead and correct them. You can start right now to develop an awareness of what are the most favorable times—and there will still be a great many of them—to make your child a more reliable, more responsible person!

RULES OF THUMB

- Watch for your child's first attempts to help you or to do things for himself. Encourage these attempts.
- Praise a child for trying to help out.
- Don't criticize or condemn poor results. Gradually and tactfully steer toward better ones.
- Know when a child is ready for larger responsibilities and then let him take them on.
- Let young people know that you trust and have confidence in them.
- Always try to set a task or a goal that you think the child has a reasonable chance to achieve.

3

When there's work to be done

All work and no play may make Jack a dull boy. But all play and no work won't have the opposite effect on Jack. In fact, chances are he'd be just as dull and unhappy, and with three strikes against him as far as his relation to others is concerned. Almost nobody is as unpopular as the person—adult or child—who never pitches in when there's work to be done, who shuns responsibility.

Parents and teachers cannot teach responsibility to children without teaching them to do their fair share of work. A "fair share," of course, is based on a person's age, ability, and aptitudes. But no one should be entirely exempt. Some people say, "Childhood is the time for being carefree and for having fun. There's plenty of time for buckling down to hard work later on." But work, like other habits, must be learned. And it needn't be a hardship or burden for children.

Work and play go together

Work can be pleasant. A child can like doing necessary tasks and doing them well if he learns to accept work as a part of everyday living when he is young. It is between the ages of 3 and 7 that a person gains the feeling that a job well done gives pleasure and satisfaction. If he hasn't gained it then, it's very likely he won't have it at 20 or 30, when work is inescapable.

He may become the kind of half-hearted worker for whom minutes and hours drag by endlessly until the quitting whistle blows. The kind who does his work perfunctorily and inadequately, without achieving any satisfaction.

One of the ways in which a person can gain a positive attitude toward work is by acquiring the work habit early, by having tasks to do of which he is capable, and by gaining satisfaction from their accomplishment. Some

parents, reluctant to "boss" their children or to exercise any discipline, feel that the teacher should train children to work at a job and to do it well. This, however, is not tender-heartedness or kindness to children. For to wait for the school to supply the firmness and incentives necessary to teach the child to take on responsibility is often to wait too long.

By that time, the child may have learned the trick of just doing enough to get by, of meeting only the minimum requirements instead of giving his best. Or he may have become so indifferent that it is hard for teachers to reach him and stimulate him into any work interests of his own. The child is also likely to be confused by the apparently conflicting attitudes toward responsibility held by his parents and his teachers.

Finding suitable work

Some people feel that today's push-button world offers little opportunity for suitable tasks for young children. Much of the feeling that the "good old days" offered more opportunities for youngsters to help out at home is just an excuse for our own lack of ideas and imagination.

In every household—even the smallest, most mechanized apartment—there are many jobs for children of all ages. And many households are not as ideally equipped and easy to operate as those depicted in the movies and in household magazines.

Two years is not too young for a child to start picking up his own toys. Three-year-olds can empty ash trays, even dry pots and pans. Four-year-olds can help with table-setting, hang their own clothes on low hooks, go to the store if there are no streets to cross. Five-year-olds can watch younger brothers or sisters, care for pets, do a passing-fair job of dusting furniture.

"Quickies" like these are best for the preschoolers. They're simple and don't take too long; youngsters of this age lose interest very quickly. The important thing with preschoolers is not the elaborateness of the job, but daily responsibility willingly assumed and faithfully discharged. The responsibility must not be beyond the child's age or ability, of course. And we can't expect 3- and 4-year-olds to remember their responsibilities from day to day, all by themselves. They've got to be reminded—sometimes two or three times!

Home jobs for grade-schoolers

The grade-school-age child can be expected to make his own bed, but perhaps he'll need help on sheet-changing day. He can also go to the store regularly, water the lawn and cut the grass, take care of a pet, wash the car, and maybe have a paper route or some not too demanding after-school

Grade-schoolers can help Mother and Dad find a little time for relaxation.

job. Girls can set and clear the table, wash dishes, iron flat work, dust and sweep, and wash out their own nylons and woolens.

For teen-agers

By the time a child is in his teens, he should be so accustomed to cooperative family living that helping out is second nature. But most teen-agers, with so many new interests and activities, are likely to do a little "back-sliding" on work responsibilities. Especially if there are younger children in the house, the teen-ager may feel, "I did my share when the others were too little to help out—now let them take over."

One possible solution to this problem is making time for the older child's outside activities. If there is a Scout meeting on Tuesday night, certainly it is not fair to keep 14-year-old Roy away from it because it is his night to do supper dishes. Better scheduling is called for. Parents should be considerate of teen-agers' outside arrangements—if, of course, the teen-agers remember their home obligations.

Adolescent daughters can plan meals, take over much of the Saturday shopping, perhaps keep accounts and write checks for monthly bills. Older boys can take down storm windows, tend the furnace, and see to it that the car is greased regularly and in shape to pass the safety inspection.

It's especially important that these older children have some household duties that seem important to them and are in keeping with their greater maturity. A 16-year-old boy, for example, shouldn't only have to wash the car—he should be permitted to participate in the discussion about buying a new car or getting the present one overhauled. A teen-age girl should not only have to vacuum and wash windows—she should have a voice in deciding on fabrics and paint colors at redecorating time, too.

Priority for part-time jobs

Unless the situation at home really requires it, home chores should not stand in the way of the teen-ager's holding down a part-time job—as a store clerk, baby-sitter, delivery boy, gas station attendant. Part-time work is, after all, a source of income and of prestige to a teen-ager. It's also usually more interesting than housework, and may have some value in helping choose a career.

Doing work around the house helps a child learn to share and cooperate, to develop a sense of family pride and solidarity. But an "honest-to-goodness" job—an outside job for which he receives wages—has definite values in teaching responsibility, too, and gradually a teen-age child should be allowed to give more time to a job and less time to home chores, if he so chooses.

"Man's" work, "woman's" work

It used to be that parents and teachers talked about a man's work and a woman's work as if all jobs were endowed with separate and distinct sex characteristics and fitted neatly into one category or the other. Nowadays we are more sensible about these things. We know that it doesn't make a man a sissy if he helps with the dishes or makes flapjacks for the family every Sunday morning. Nor is it considered unwomanly for a girl to be able to replace a fuse or fix a light socket.

"Swapping" typical boy and girl household duties from time to time helps to relieve some of the monotony that children object to so mightily. Boys make fine cooks (many schools now have boys' cooking clubs) and it's mighty useful for a boy to have some kitchen ability if he's ever going to do some camping. Here it helps a lot if Dad has a special way of spicing chili and isn't ashamed to be seen in an apron occasionally.

A young girl will be infinitely more useful and self-reliant if she isn't a total stranger to a hammer and screw driver. To be able to fix a leaky faucet or a jammed window will stand her in good stead all her life. The more different kinds of work young people can do capably, the better off

they are in today's world of machines, gadgets, working wives, and fathers who have to take a hand in running the house and raising the children.

Relieving the monotony

It's all very well to say that children should work around the house. But what can be done when they evade their obligations or turn in slipshod performances?

This is much less likely to happen if parents vary the jobs and give youngsters some choice of duties. The same job day after day soon gets tiresome, and doesn't let the child make maximum use of his abilities or explore different interests.

If children show signs of boredom, it is advisable to give them new tasks. Even a whole week of the same duty may pall on an 8- or 9-year-old. Insofar as possible, it's a good idea to assign tasks that offer a challenge. Eleven-year-old Alice was quite enthusiastic at first about her job of setting the table for breakfast every Sunday. But after a few weeks she began to lose interest and to become a little careless in her performance. Her mother wisely gave her more to do. Instead of just setting the table, now Alice prepares breakfast on Sunday. Since she plans the whole meal herself and does not have to help clean up afterwards, she finds this job much more stimulating and interesting than her previous chore.

Working together

Another important point to remember in avoiding boredom is that children, especially preschoolers, work much better if someone works along with them. Grownups today are too often likely to be busy with other things and to make too few opportunities to work side by side with their children, as parents used to do a few generations back.

It is easier for a 4- or 5-year-old to dust furniture or shine his shoes if his mother or father is right there in the room working along with him—and commenting occasionally on what a fine job he is doing!

The equipment should be suited to the job, too. Perhaps the small dishwasher needs a stool to reach the sink more easily. A junior-size broom or dustpan may be necessary for the assistant sweeper-upper.

Another thing: Children work more happily and willingly if their parents are willing and happy workers. Comments like, "Oh, dear, dishes to do again" or "Keeping this house clean is getting the better of me" aren't conducive to a happy, matter-of-fact attitude toward work on the part of children. If parents can take work in their stride, children will, too.

At the same time, every child should be free to express his preferences and dislikes for household chores. One mother, in assigning work to her four youngsters, lets them list three "likes" apiece and one "pet peeve." The plan works pretty well, except that there are a few jobs that *all* children like and a few that they all dislike. As far as possible, the children have their first choice of jobs. The "peeves" are rotated so no one escapes them, and no one is saddled with them more often than are the others in the family.

What about shirkers?

What about the child who shirks his work? Letting the child suffer the natural outcome of his own shirking is usually the most effective way of handling the situation.

Ruth, for example, was supposed to rinse out her own underthings and stockings, but she avoided this by putting them in the laundry hamper instead. Just scolding Ruth did not help. Her mother finally permitted Ruth's clothes to accumulate in the hamper until one morning the girl discovered there were no clean things for her to wear. One day of wearing soiled things accomplished more than weeks of daily reminders and scolding.

Bob was supposed to stop by the bakery every evening on his way home from school to buy a loaf of bread. He kept "forgetting." One afternoon, he found that his lunch consisted of crackers and cheese. What little bread there was, was divided among the other children for sandwiches. Bob's memory improved a great deal as a result of this experience.

A helping hand: when to lend it

It is wise to check up on a child's work so any defects can be remedied while he's still around. Parents should not lightly pass over slipshod work or redo it themselves—provided, of course, the work is within the youngster's ability to do well. Accepting slipshod accomplishment deprives the youngster of the chance to learn how to work cooperatively and to turn in a useful performance. One mother always paints her fingernails while her children are doing their chores on Saturday morning. The wet polish counteracts the temptation to lend too generous a hand.

Of course, parents should be lenient and flexible about the matter of housework. When a child is burdened with homework or has to study especially hard in some school subject, or if a last minute date materializes, then it's reasonable and democratic to pitch in and help, or even to take over altogether. That's one of the ways children learn the important lesson of helping someone out of a jam.

In any home, no matter how small, there are endless tasks to be done every day. If everyone pitches in, it makes for a closer family, a better-run house, and more free time for everyone. It's good for parents. It's good for children. It's no favor to any child to let him escape household chores.

RULES OF THUMB

- Praise the youngster for good performance. He thrives on approval and withers on criticism.
- Make it plain to the child that his help helps the whole family.
- Switch chores if children get bored or begin falling down on their performance.
- Share the work as equitably as possible, according to age, ability, and interests.
- Plan surprises. For example, occasionally relieve the youngster of his chores, or make a holiday of all housework one week end.
- Remember that children always reflect parents' attitudes toward work.

4

Rewards and punishment

People tend to do what makes them comfortable and to avoid doing what gives them pain. There is nothing very remarkable about this. What is remarkable is that more parents and teachers don't take advantage of this principle in training children.

The formula is fundamentally very simple: MAKE RESPONSIBILITY FUN.

Basically, assuming responsibility *is* pleasurable. It *is* fun. It gives a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. It makes a person feel important and useful. These are good feelings—a reward in themselves. But we can reward responsible children even more by adding our praise and appreciation.

In a survey by Norma E. Cutts and Nicholas Moseley, young children were asked how it made them feel to be praised. The consensus of the answers was: "Praise makes me feel good and want to do it (the act for which the child was praised) again." One child said that praise made him feel like "king of the whole world."

Parents who took part in this survey unanimously reported that "praise works wonders." One mother of a "very happy, useful, unselfish, easy-to-get-along-with child, well adjusted at home and at school," found praise to be the most satisfactory way to handle anyone—man, woman, or child.

Praise in school

All good teachers make use of praise to get results with children, too. The teacher who scolds and criticizes frequently, but rarely praises, is seldom successful. One teacher had the unhappy experience of hearing herself talked about by some children in the hall outside her room. "She can find more things to holler about than any teacher I ever had. Does anyone *ever* do anything right for her?"

It was pretty hard to take. But the teacher really felt her class this semester was a trial. They had given her trouble from the beginning. Of course she never praised the children—she hadn't noticed anything to praise them for. On the other hand, maybe they hadn't found her very encouraging.

The next morning she decided to try to live down this reputation of unpleasantness. She started the class by smiling and telling the boys and girls how fresh and bright and clean they all looked. Some of the youngsters replied that she looked nice, too. And all the class seemed pleased as well as surprised. Maybe it was a coincidence, but that day went quite well. And relations between the teacher and class improved steadily thereafter.

The teacher reported: "Now I praise my children for the least little thing they do well. I find it results in fewer things done wrong. One little boy who used to be my worst headache has recently taken to staying after school and helping me tidy up the room. When I asked him why, he said, 'It makes me feel good when you call me your helper.' "

A little praise goes a long way in getting children to work cooperatively.

In another case, one little boy made trouble for the whole school, teachers and children alike. He teased, picked fights, was impertinent, and generally made himself unpopular. The child evidently was unhappy and didn't know how to make friends and behave in an acceptable manner.

An understanding teacher chose this belligerent little boy several times for the honor of staying after school to feed Pinky, the pet rabbit. She

made friends with him. One evening she suggested that the two of them form a secret club. Each day they would say or do something nice for three people and after school they would have a meeting and report what happened. Through the teacher's praise and interest the boy became less of a tease and bully and learned how to get along with the other children.

Reward or bribe?

Achievement always deserves praise. But certainly a child should not be *bribed* to be good or to assume responsibility. When a cash value is set on a child's behavior, there is always the risk that he will decide the price he's getting for being good isn't worth the effort.

Linda was offered a dime for having the light off in her room by nine o'clock. For three nights she was in bed on time and got her dime. On the fourth night she said before going to bed, "I spent my 30 cents on comic books and tonight I'm going to read them. I don't need any more money."

Children should be taught to follow a particular pattern of conduct, not for the reward involved, but because it is the right and necessary pattern to follow. Why offer dessert, for example, as a reward for eating the important and necessary main course of a meal? It does not seem logical to represent nourishment the child needs as painful, distasteful, and something that he has to be paid for eating. Food can and should be good and pleasurable in itself. If parents approach food as something to be enjoyed, children will, too. Mealtimes should be pleasant occasions rather than ordeals characterized by tension, wrangling, and the desire to get the whole thing over with as quickly as possible.

When punishment is necessary

The pleasure principle has an opposite side, which can be equally effective as a teaching device. If we make a forbidden action painful enough, a child will be reluctant to repeat it.

Children generally can't be raised without a certain amount of punishment, but the wiser the parent or teacher, the less punishment is needed.

Having to punish a child is always an admission of defeat on the part of the parent or teacher. It means that we haven't been able to secure our ends by any other method. We couldn't get the child to be good or to do what was expected of him in any other way. Fathers about to spank their sons traditionally say, "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you." The answer is that it should! When an adult has to punish a child, he really should punish himself—for failing.

It is sometimes necessary, however, to punish a child as a means of

The aim of discipline is to teach, not to provide release for worry or anger.

teaching him more acceptable behavior. How do we punish effectively, so that it helps rather than hinders a child in developing responsibility?

Ineffective punishment

First, let's look at the kind of punishment experience has shown to be ineffective—even harmful.

Julia, a very timid girl, was supposed to come right home from school as soon as class was dismissed. This seemed a logical and simple demand to make of a 6-year-old. One day, however, the school bus went by the house and Julia didn't get off. Julia didn't come home until past six o'clock. She explained to her mother that she got off the bus at Betty's house to see Betty's new doll carriage. She had planned to stay only a few minutes, but they had started to play house, and before she knew it, it had gotten very late.

The explanation wasn't satisfactory to Julia's mother. Julia was spanked, sent to her room, and deprived of after-school play privileges for a week. Her mother told Julia she had been very naughty, that she had made her mother "almost frantic with worry," and that hereafter if she did not come home immediately after school, the penalty would be more drastic.

This punishment relieved a lot of the mother's pent-up worry. But it did the child a great deal of harm. Julia began to fret at the slightest delay in getting home from school—such as being stopped by a patrol boy at a busy crossing. And one day, when the bus broke down, she started to cry for fear she would be spanked for coming home late.

Obviously, in this case the punishment did not fit the offense. No punishment should make a child so fearful of displeasing his parent that every situation seems fraught with possibilities of doing so.

Many parents resort to scolding rather than actual punishment. Repeated scolding, though, loses its effectiveness. And when it degenerates into endless nagging and criticism it may cause a youngster to lose respect for and even to resent his parent or teacher.

Bruce, 10, said of his parents, "They are always yap-yapping at me. Whatever I do is wrong. So why bother any more? I broke a window, but I didn't mean it. As soon as it happened I knew they wouldn't listen to my side of it. When *they* break a dish they call it an accident. But when a kid does something bad they think it's because he's mean. I plain give up."

Nagging certainly wasn't achieving the desired result of teaching Bruce more responsibility! Crossness and continued nagging may provoke similar responses in a child. Or else they may cause an unhealthy cynicism. As one boy said, "They give me a tongue lashing. I just let it go in one ear and out the other. I can even look sorry, even though I don't hear a word they say."

Constructive punishment

The best medicine for irresponsible behavior is to allow the offender to take the consequences of his behavior. This is the hard but just principle that life exacts from us all. Though we grumble about it, we recognize it as fair. So do children. If Dick leaves his bike out in the rain and has to spend several hours cleaning off the mud and rust, he learns more from this punishment than from any penalty his parents might impose.

Good school discipline is based on this principle. Words spelled incorrectly or arithmetic problems answered faultily must be done over correctly. Or, when a test is involved, errors result in a low or failing grade. Children regard this as entirely fair. They accept as a matter of course the whole idea of suffering the logical consequences of their mistakes. And they learn by this method of punishment not to repeat the same mistakes.

Parents can profitably make use of this method in home discipline. It almost never causes undue resentment when a child has to pay, at least in part, for a window he broke, or if he misses out on some excursion because he failed to take responsibility for getting ready in time.

The same principle applies in requiring a child to repeat a slipshod performance and turn in a better one. This way, he learns the wisdom of doing everything as well as he can the first time, whether it is homework or housework. This is the best way to make irresponsibility seem futile and unrewarding to the child.

However, this is only the negative side of the picture. Although punishment is sometimes necessary, responsibility can best be taught to children if it's made to appear attractive and worth while. Children like to do what is pleasant. Parents and teachers can help by demonstrating positive attitudes toward responsibility and by being responsible themselves.

RULES OF THUMB

- Praise more than you punish. Praise for effort as well as performance. Trying hard shows responsibility, even if results aren't perfect.
- Don't keep punishing for the same offense. If a child keeps repeating an offense, it's wise to stop and look for the causes. Make an effort to understand *why* the child is misbehaving.
- Never threaten to do something you don't intend to carry out. Warnings are often effective, but you must be prepared to stick to your guns.,
- Be sure your praise is sincere. Children are quick to sense the counterfeit compliment.
- Bribes are a mistake. They can backfire and cause more harm than good. They suggest to the child the possibility of the opposite of what you want, and set a price tag on being good and responsible.
- Trust the child and have confidence in him. Give him credit for good intentions. Believe the best of him and you will be much more likely to get the best from him.

5

Pushing too hard—expecting too little

Two mothers were discussing their respective offspring at a parent-teacher's tea.

"Your Libby is such a little lady," said the first mother wistfully. "She acts so *grown-up.* I wish I could say the same for my Alice, but I know from experience I just can't depend on her for *anything.*"

"Oh, Alice will probably grow out of it," consoled the second mother. Then she added proudly, "Of course, I've never permitted Libby to get away with any foolishness. I've always *treated* her like a grownup and expected her to act like one."

Opposite extremes

Fortunately, most parents avoid the mistake made by Libby's mother, of pushing their children too hard; or that made by Alice's mother, of expecting too little. A wise middle course between these two extremes is the most effective course to follow in helping children develop responsibility.

But when parents adhere to one or the other extreme, one of the results is likely to be a distorted attitude toward responsibility and a distorted sense of values on the part of the child.

Pushing too hard

Ten-year-old Sarah watches her younger sister like a hawk. Neighbors say they have never seen an older child so devoted to caring for and protecting a younger brother or sister. But Sarah's parents are a little worried. They think Sarah is "unnaturally" good. And she's so quick to point out misbehavior or naughtiness in others. She is always carrying tales home about her sister's supposed misbehavior. At school she tattles to teachers

about the other children. She almost never misbehaves. She can be counted on to behave responsibly—too responsibly for a 10-year-old.

Sue, a 15-year-old, has what her parents call a "passion for cleanliness." No article of clothes can be worn for more than one day. Wrinkles, spots of dirt, stains, even faded colors upset her. Her closets, books, desk are all scrupulously tidy. Her pencils are arranged according to length. She copies and recopies her homework and notebooks so there are no blots, no mistakes, no erasures. Looking after one's own things is evidence of responsibility, of course. But Sue's cleanliness has practically enslaved her. She has no time for anything else, and is inordinately unhappy in any situation that calls for "roughing it." Picnics, beach parties, and camping trips are real ordeals for her.

The child who overemphasizes perfection may have a deep emotional problem.

Then there's Harry, who seems to have only one goal in life—to get better grades in school than anyone else. *B's* aren't good enough—he wants the highest average of all. This is difficult for Harry to achieve, because he's only a little above average in intelligence. The only way he can keep ahead of everyone else is by spending almost all his out-of-class time doing homework, and by doing special credit projects. One look at Harry tells you he's not happy. He's preoccupied, tense, and restless. Because of his competitiveness and anxiety about his school standing—and also because he has no time for social activities—he is either disliked or ignored by his classmates. Harry's teacher feels that Harry really isn't interested in acquir-

ing knowledge for its own sake, but that he's trying to use schoolwork to establish his superiority.

What's behind perfectionism?

These three youngsters have this in common: they are not happy; they have no sense of security.

Sarah, supposedly intent on behaving well and proving her devotion to her younger sister, has become a busybody, informing on and discrediting others at every opportunity—including the sister she thinks she is devoted to.

Sue's concentration on being neat and orderly permits her no time or opportunity for being a normal 15-year-old and enjoying normal teen-age experiences.

Harry wants high marks in school so badly that he foregoes all other interests. Because high marks and the prestige they bring have become an end in themselves, and because he is constantly worried about his marks, even the knowledge he acquired in the process of studying hard gives him little pleasure.

These three have something else in common: behind their excessive sense of responsibility lies a home environment in which too much was expected of them, in which they were made overly conscious of the importance of becoming competent, "good," and responsible.

Take Harry's parents. Both have college educations; both are professional people, highly intelligent and well informed; both want their only child to become a "truly educated, cultured person." Harry's education started when he was a baby. When he began to talk, his parents permitted no "baby talk" and corrected his grammar and enunciation. He played only with "educational" and "constructive" toys. His mother read to him only from "good" books, classics which she considered suitable for a youngster. When he was 5, his father tried to teach him to play chess and to read. He wanted Harry to have a head start in school, perhaps be double-promoted, and enter college at 16.

But Harry just did not have the mental ability (perhaps no child would have!) to live up to what his parents expected of him in school. However, knowing how set his father and mother were on having him do superior work, and feeling sure that this was the only way in which he could win their love and approval, Harry strained almost to the breaking point to live up to their expectations.

Sarah and Sue have home environments similar to Harry's. Sarah was always admonished to act "grown-up," not to be "bad," and not to annoy her parents and other grownups. When her sister was born, Sarah was 9

years old. She was told that she wasn't a child any more, but a young lady with responsibility to love and look after the baby. Any "childish" act met with sharp parental disapproval and an admonishment that "I don't like you when you behave like that."

It makes Sarah angry and upset now to see other children doing things she is warned against doing. She relieves these feelings and gains a sense of importance by carrying tales at every opportunity. And she justifies her conduct by assuring herself that after all it is only "right" to report "bad" or childish behavior.

Sue's parents also expect her always to be the "little lady." Even when she was very little they forbade her ever to muss up her clean, dainty dresses or to make noise or to play rough. She never did feel she was lady-like enough to suit her mother. Now that she's entered adolescence and she has many new and difficult physical and social adjustments to make, cleanliness and orderliness have resumed their former position of major importance in her life. Although Sue can't quite explain it, she thinks that being scrupulously clean and neat will counteract some of the disturbing feelings she has been experiencing lately.

Acting their age

These three examples are extremes. Few parents expect such a degree of maturity, achievement, and responsibility in their children. But many parents make the same kind of error to a lesser extent.

Many parents expect their children to be pocket-edition adults from the beginning. They expect more responsibility than their children can normally, without undue effort and harm, deliver. They push their children too hard. And because approval and love of parents is highly important, the children strive to please at the cost of normal childhood experiences.

The children tend to become perfectionists, regarding anything less than perfect as an indication of personal failure. It's easy to see how children who feel they must meet too-high standards and who are afraid to make mistakes feel tense and unhappy.

Sometimes, when too much is expected from children, they develop tics, stutters, and other nervous reactions. Others become discouraged and disheartened, and give up the struggle to meet impossible demands. They may resort to misbehaving and doing things wrong deliberately. Or they may become defeated and hopeless in their general attitude toward life, and give up trying to get along with people or to do well in school.

In order to be happy children and to grow up to healthy adulthood, children must be permitted to *be children,* and to act their age.

Bringing up a child takes close to 21 years. Every lesson in responsi-

bility must be geared to the child's state of development and his abilities. Parents and teachers need to avoid expecting too much too soon of children. Children should be allowed to be frolicsome, even mischievous, while at the same time they are taught responsibility. As parents and teachers, we should expect slips and lapses from approved patterns of behavior, and we should not be afraid to acknowledge that mistakes are made by everyone. No one is perfect, and children should not be led to believe that teachers and parents can do no wrong, and that they (the children) must also live up to this standard. It helps a child to admit his own shortcomings and want to do whatever he can about correcting them if his parents and teachers freely admit their own.

We should settle for little progress in little things, a little at a time. Even Benjamin Franklin tried to form only one good habit at a time. No parent should expect more from a child!

Expecting too little

The other extreme, expecting *too little* of a child, can be harmful, too. More parents probably lean toward this extreme than toward the other. One of the reasons for this is that there is a great deal of misunderstanding about the teachings of modern child psychology. Many people erroneously misinterpret modern theory as advocating that children be given complete freedom uninhibited by rules and regulations.

It is true that child-training experts advise against forcing a youngster to do things that are unnatural for his age or emotional or physical development—for example, attempting to make a 9-month-old baby keep his diaper dry and unsoiled, or admonishing an active 6-year-old that "children should be seen but not heard." But no child-care expert advocates letting a child grow up without any clear guidance, discipline, or control.

Learning responsibility requires training by parents and teachers. Dr. Benjamin Spock, author of *The Common Sense Book of Child Care*, says: "Children not only aren't harmed by firmness—they welcome it. The 3-year-old is glad, underneath, to have his mother keep him from being mean to the baby (as long as she doesn't act as if she hates him for it). The 7-year-old who is nervous about going to school is made more secure when his father reminds him that he *has* to go anyway. The adolescent girl, no matter how much she protests, wants her mother to tell her that she must come in at a reasonable hour in the evening."

Firm but friendly

It's a mistake for a parent to fear that his child won't love him if he (the parent) is firm and expects reasonable behavior. Being firm doesn't

mean being cross or scolding. Nor does it necessarily imply being critical. A firm manner can be entirely friendly, cheerful, definite, and matter-of-fact.

One mother of a 5-year-old boy, who hated to discipline her child because she wanted him to develop freely and to love her, realized that the boy wasn't enjoying his freedom from supervision. He wasn't happy or pleased with himself. And at times he seemed to nag deliberately and to antagonize his mother until she finally was provoked into disciplining him.

For her own part, the mother wasn't satisfied with the state of affairs, either. Not only was the child irritable and obviously unhappy, but he was fast becoming the type of child other people did not find agreeable to have around. His behavior in stores wore out the clerks and made things unpleasant for the other customers. And when his mother took him visiting, his complete lack of consideration for others caused obvious distress. His mother finally realized that it was unfair to the boy himself to let him become unpopular because of his irresponsible conduct.

She began to expect more of the boy—to define clearly for him what she considered proper and improper behavior. Instead of permitting situations requiring discipline to develop, she tried to avoid them by speaking out before she became angered by some outrage.

She said *no* to certain forbidden things, and she backed up her *no's* with punishment when necessary. There were some tantrums, and a great deal of astonishment on the boy's part when they didn't get him his own way. But before very long he realized that his mother meant what she said, and he accepted the new regime: bed by eight o'clock, all toys put away before the TV set is turned on, outdoor clothes hung in the hall closet, milk and cookies at three o'clock and nothing else before supper, and the same consideration for the rights and possessions of others that he expected for himself.

This kind of discipline made a big difference in the boy's own feelings. He was less restless, and less uncertain about what was expected of him. He played better with his friends, and was generally more cheerful and cooperative.

His mother's last bit of fear that if she disciplined him he wouldn't love her disappeared when one day she heard the youngster remark confidently to a playmate who was engaged in a forbidden activity: "*My* mother won't let me do that because she knows it isn't *good* for me."

A child can understand that it is out of love that we parents and teachers sometimes forbid things. We have to expect things, too. Not too much. But enough so that the child keeps developing steadily toward maturity and responsibility. It makes a child happy and secure to know what is expected of him and to know, too, that his parents and teachers won't let him become anything less than his best self. To a child, not expecting too little

is to let him know that you truly care about him and have his best interests very much at heart.

RULES OF THUMB

- Allow your child to make mistakes without feeling guilty. Let him know the important thing is trying.
- Admit your own mistakes when you make them. Then he won't feel he has to be perfect.
- Adopt the attitude of a teacher who tells her class, "Mistakes don't count. Correcting them does."
- Let your child know what to expect. It's the fair thing to do, and prevents a great deal of misunderstanding.
- Be firm when necessary, but be kind always.
- Overlook as many faults as you can. Correct only when necessary.
- Never make fun of or ridicule a child.

6

Responsibility at school

Remember when the schoolroom was as quiet as a mausoleum? When a class was rated good if everyone sat stone-still and spoke only when spoken to? Children were obedient puppets then—they responded only when the teacher pulled the right string.

The autocratic method of teaching is disappearing. In more and more schools, especially in the lower grades, teachers realize the importance of permitting and encouraging children to participate actively, to express their views, to feel free to move about and explore, to make plans and to cooperate with each other. There's a lot more freedom in our schools today—freedom that makes children more responsive and more responsible.

Some parents may feel that discipline breaks down under this new system, that without the old-time strict training, where children sat in silence, hands clasped and backs straight as ramrods, they may become unruly and "untrainable." But experience helps prove the fallacy of this belief.

It used to be that when a teacher left the room for a minute, or for some reason didn't get to the classroom on time, all the little puppet-children suddenly came to life. Bedlam broke loose!

But one day Miss Tudor, a third grade teacher, was unavoidably late. When the children arrived and found no teacher, they talked and visited back and forth for a while, and then slowly drifted to their seats. Some of them started to discuss their homework assignment of the night before, a story of Abraham Lincoln's childhood in Kentucky. It was a good story, about how Lincoln successfully fought the town bully and how he studied by the light of a fire and did his lessons by writing with a charred stick on a shovel.

There were still a few private conversations going on in addition to the main discussion of the story, and the noise level was somewhat higher than usual, but the children for the most part were well behaved.

The principal, having had a phone call from Miss Tudor, went up to the room to take charge until she arrived. He found the children so orderly that after choosing one child to be in charge of the class he left to take care of other matters!

Later the principal asked Miss Tudor how she managed to have such an orderly class, one that could carry on so well without superimposed discipline.

"Well," Miss Tudor said, "I don't conduct my class like a prison with the idea that my children should give me as little trouble as possible. So there's no reason for them to act like little convicts suddenly turned loose when I'm out of the room. We plan things together. We decide on projects together. We solve problems together. We share our experiences and discoveries. We have committees and special groups. My children feel responsible for what goes on in the classroom because I give them a part in running the class."

Thinking, planning, and acting together, as the children did in Miss Tudor's class, are the very heart of democratic living.

Good work habits

Teachers are really the child's first introduction to the big outside world beyond home and family. The individual child is no longer the central figure to whose particular desires and interests everything else is geared. He learns what it's like to be treated objectively (although still

In the schoolroom, as at home, working together helps build responsibility.

with kindness and consideration), as one of a group of children, all with equal rights. Seeing himself realistically in relation to other people does a great deal to strengthen his personality and to make him a more responsible person.

Many parents are amazed at how self-reliant and independent their children become in a few weeks after starting school. Youngsters who have never taken off their own overshoes or washed their own faces insist on doing things for themselves because "that's what we do in school."

The youngster who had to be cajoled into brushing his teeth may now insist on brushing his teeth after every meal, at night, and in the morning. The reason: "Miss Jones says brushing teeth keeps Old Man Tooth Decay away."

Parents may be puzzled by the unquestioning respect young children often show for their teacher, and by the weight of authority every opinion or suggestion of the teacher seems to carry. The teacher is a new person in the child's life, and the most important figure in a new world the child is not familiar with. Too, since the child is not emotionally involved with his teacher as he is with his parents, he may accept direction from her with a good deal less resistance.

Homework

One of the ways in which a youngster learns good work habits and responsibility at school is through homework assignments. The child is given a job to do by himself out of school, he must work on it until he has completed it, and his performance must come up to a certain standard.

Because homework does teach responsibility, it's important that parents understand this and cooperate by attributing appropriate importance to homework assignments. Complaining that "that teacher gives you too much homework," or making demands on the child's time that make it difficult for him to complete his assignment can seriously confuse a child as to just what his responsibilities are and hinder his development into a responsible person. Here are some of the ways parents can help teachers teach good work habits and responsibility through homework:

- Help the child schedule his time so that he can get his homework done. Give him a quiet, well-lighted place to do his work in.
- Take an interest in his homework and discuss it with him if he welcomes such discussion.
- Approve his efforts in school—praise him for gold stars and good grades.
- Reward good homework performance, too. "Miss Jones told me that your homework papers are much better this semester. If

you're caught up pretty well, let's take a night off next week and go to a hockey game."

- Let him know that you and his teachers see eye to eye on the matter of completing homework assignments. "I'm sorry, Buddy, but you'll have to put more time in on your homework. That means no more ball games after school. Miss Kahn told me at the PTA meeting that your work hasn't been very good lately."
- If you are reasonably certain the child is doing his best—even if the results are somewhat disappointing to you personally—don't

If a child is doing the best he can, it's unwise to demand more from him.

demand any more from him. And don't let him feel that your love or approval depends on his comparative standing in school.

It's irresponsible to cheat

A problem in teaching responsibility is the matter of cheating in schoolwork. The child who cheats is not behaving responsibly. Cheating is a short-cut method of obtaining what you want—a way of getting something for nothing, of taking a reward for effort without supplying the effort.

There are many reasons for cheating. Sometimes a child regards cheating as a way of outwitting the teacher. Or he may want to appear adven-

turous and daring in the eyes of the other children for taking a risk. If the cheater is caught and severely punished, he may even seem like a martyr to his classmates.

Overemphasis on comparative class standing of children may also result in cheating. The child may feel the only way he can gain status is by being at the top of the class.

Parents, too, are sometimes the cause of a child's cheating. Perhaps they expect too much of the child, and he can meet their standards of performance only by cheating.

Root of the problem

Widespread cheating destroys the morale of a class by destroying one of the incentives for learning and making honest achievement seem hardly worth while. As one youngster told his mother, "Why should I study or do my homework? The kids that cheat get the good grades." The good teacher will try to get to the root of the cheating problem and try to eliminate the causes.

If she feels a youngster cheats because of a strong sense of competition, she can stress the fact that the important thing to her is doing one's best, rather than making the fewest mistakes. Because cheating is not regarded as bad or wrong by so many children, the teacher can explain that cheating is a form of stealing. When you cheat you are taking something—knowledge—that doesn't belong to you. It's the same as taking another person's hat or lunch pail.

Whatever the circumstances are, the way a teacher handles a cheating incident is very important. A fourth-grade teacher discovered that one of her pupils was copying answers during an arithmetic test. A good student in all other subjects, the boy had gotten *D* in arithmetic on his last report card. The teacher talked to him after school and learned that his parents had promised him a two-wheeler bicycle if he brought his arithmetic grade up to at least a *B* by the end of the semester. He wanted the bicycle badly, but didn't think he could show *that* much improvement in a few months.

The teacher sympathized with the boy's desire, but pointed out that he probably wouldn't feel good about it if he got the bicycle by cheating. He would be cheating his parents, really, because he wouldn't be living up to his end of the bargain. The teacher agreed, too, that bringing his grade all the way up to a *B* was an unrealistic goal. She suggested that the boy ask his parents if he could have the bicycle provided the teacher wrote them at the end of the term that he had shown a lot of improvement in his work and had really tried. She also offered to help him after school on Thursdays with anything he didn't understand.

The boy's parents agreed to this arrangement, and the boy, spurred on by the understanding attitude of his parents and teacher almost as much as by his desire for the bicycle, showed a great deal of improvement by the end of the semester. It was an important lesson in responsibility for him.

Children through the teacher's eye

A teacher sees a child differently than his parents do and is therefore better able to evaluate a child's progress toward becoming responsible.

A teacher deals with many children in the same age group. She sees them tackle new problems. She sees them playing. She knows how much teasing and bullying a child can take—and give. She knows whether the child is a leader, if he's willing to follow, or if he just sits and watches. These are important indications of a child's stage of growth toward responsibility.

Few parents see their children at work and in groups to the extent that teachers do. And parents can rarely equal the teacher's objectivity in evaluating children. The teacher, in fact, can often help a parent with a child's personality problem.

One mother and her 5-year-old girl had a very close relationship. On

Teachers and parents often see children in two completely different lights.

Saturdays they shopped together. On Sundays they went to the movies and for walks. After school the little girl sat and played with her dolls and watched her mother prepare supper. The mother accompanied the child to and from school, and also picked her up at lunchtime.

Without realizing it, the mother had cut the child off from all ties with children her own age, and from the knocks and bumps that such ties would bring. The child didn't know how to play with other boys and girls, she had no interest in games, she was shy and withdrawn, and she never volunteered or took the lead in any activity.

But the teacher, observing the child day after day in the classroom, and on the playground during recess periods, could see that the little girl was overly timid and afraid of responsibility, and that as a result she isolated herself completely from the other children.

During a scheduled parent-teacher conference the teacher mentioned her observation to the child's mother, who reluctantly admitted that lately she herself had worried a little about the girl's shyness. But she hadn't known what the cause was or just how to handle it.

"I thought treating her like a friend or a sister rather than a child and spending all the time I could with her was a good idea," she said. "But it hasn't worked out so well."

A plan of action

The two decided on a practical plan of action. Without making any sudden changes in the child's routine, they encouraged her to do more on her own. Interesting responsibilities were added gradually. In school, she watered the plants and took care of the goldfish. Later, she was chosen co-messenger and with another child took messages around the building to the principal and other teachers. At home, her mother encouraged her to invite a classmate for lunch once in a while. The mother always managed to be "busy" after lunch so that the children could play by themselves. Eventually the child began to accept invitations extended by the other children. And although traces of shyness stayed with her for a long, long time, the little girl had made obvious progress toward the kind of independence and responsibility characteristic of other children her age.

A good teacher knows what *children* are like, whereas a parent may only know what *her child* is like. The teacher has an objective, comparative view of the child. The parent has a more subjective, narrower, although deeper view of the child. Teachers and parents supplement each other in aiding a child's development. Together they make a fine team for guiding children toward maturity and responsibility, if they cooperate and share their knowledge of children fully.

RULES OF THUMB

- If you are a parent, keep in close touch with your child's teacher.
- If you are a teacher, try to understand as fully as you can the home background of each student.
- Parents and teachers should support each other's efforts, so that the requirements of both home and school are respected by the child.
- Parents should not side with the child against the teacher, at least not without first hearing the teacher's side.
- Teachers should never criticize, blame, or try to reform parents through their children. Children need to feel that their parents are strong, wise people on whose judgment they can rely.
- Rivalry has no place in parent-teacher relationships. Each should recognize that the other is working toward the same goal, with the best interests of the child at heart.

7

Summing up

We parents and teachers must have in mind a clear picture of what we want to achieve for our children.

We want them to be independent and self-reliant, of course. We want them to be honest, reliable, and industrious, too.

We don't want them to be so concerned about themselves that they can think of no one else. We want them to protect and look after their own welfare, but we want them to be able to give some of their energy to thinking of others, too. We want them to be friendly and cooperative, and to develop into happy, effective adults.

In other words, we want them to develop a sense of responsibility. Briefly, how can we achieve these goals for our children?

1. Have faith in them

Children accept our estimate of them. If we give them the idea that they can be trusted and can succeed, they are more likely to show us that they can.

Jim's father stopped paying him an allowance because for several weeks the boy had spent too much on candy and shows and had nothing left for school lunches and carfare.

His father said, "You can't handle money sensibly, so I'll handle it for you like I used to do when you were in grade school. You come to me every time you need money for anything, and I'll decide if you should have it."

True, Jim had been irresponsible about money. But withdrawing his allowance did not make him more responsible. Nor did it teach him how to handle money sensibly. It merely made him feel that he couldn't cope with the problem of budgeting money. He was discouraged and felt inadequate, which was exactly his father's estimate of him.

Jim's father could have handled the situation by advancing Jim the minimum amount needed to cover carfare and lunches for the rest of the week, with a clear understanding that the money would be deducted from

the next few weeks' allowances. And that there were to be no future "advances," barring extreme emergencies.

2. Encourage initiative

A youngster must feel free to experiment, to do things his own way, and to use his own judgment even though it may result in mistakes. Sometimes parents understandably fear that a child will make a mess of things or hurt himself. Sometimes, too, they are reluctant to let the child grow up. They have enjoyed his babyhood, they like giving him the care a baby requires, and they want to keep him small and dependent. But no matter how much we enjoy doing things for them, if we want our children to be mature, responsible people, we must be willing to let them gradually free themselves from our authority.

Thirteen-year-old Peggy, for example, wanted to go to the summer cottage ahead of the rest of the family to get it ready for occupancy. She would stay with friends of the family at a nearby cottage until her folks arrived. Her father opposed the idea. He thought it was too big a job for Peggy to undertake, and he didn't like the idea of her taking a 200 mile trip by herself.

But her mother was on Peggy's side. She didn't want Peggy to feel as lost as she herself had felt when she got married. Her own mother never had let her do anything by herself that she could be proud of. When she set up housekeeping she was worried and uncertain about her ability. "Let's not make this mistake with Peg," she said. "Let her take on anything—within reason—that she thinks she can handle."

Children should be free to experiment, even though they will make mistakes.

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Peggy was thrilled by her achievement. She had done something all by herself, without the help of her parents. It was a big step forward toward growing up.

3. *Teach by example*

A sense of responsibility is in a sense "caught," not "taught." Parents and teachers can moralize until they are hoarse, but it doesn't make much of an impression unless *they* are responsible people themselves. If they act like adults themselves and assume their obligations with reasonable cheerfulness, there will be no need for preaching or high pronouncements. Feelings, ideas, and emotions are readily communicated by parents and teachers to children.

It's important, too, that we communicate to our children the kinds of ideas we want to see them, in turn, communicate to others. Ideas of personal integrity, and a feeling of responsibility for others as well as for themselves. Ideas of peace and friendship. Ideas of love. Ideas about behaving toward others as we would have them behave toward us.

Then out of our homes and schools will emerge true adults. Not people who think only: "What's in it for me?" or "Why should I stick my neck out?" Not people who live inside a shell and find it hard to care for any except their own families and themselves. But industrious, independent, emotionally healthy people—responsible people who can build good lives for themselves, their families, their communities, and perhaps the world.

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Better Home Discipline. *Norma E. Cutts and Nicholas Moseley.*
New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1952.

This study tells how over 6000 families discipline their children—and how the children respond.

Emotional Problems of Growing Up. *O. Spurgeon English, M.D.; and Stuart M. Finch, M.D.*
Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1951.

Chapter 5 of this booklet gives suggestions on how children can be prepared to face adult responsibilities.

Fathers Are Parents, Too. *O. Spurgeon English, M.D.; and Constance J. Foster.*
New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1951.

This book will help Mother, as well as Dad, to develop responsibility in children.

The Happy Home. *Agnes E. Benedict and Adele Franklin.*
New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948.

Here is practical advice for parents that will help them to better understand and guide their children.

How to Help Your Child Develop Successfully. *B. Von Haller Gilmer.*
New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1951.

This book deals with the personality and character development of children from infancy to 10 years.

New Ways in Discipline. *Dorothy Walter Baruch.*
Whittlesey House. McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1949.

Parents and teachers will find answers to many of their questions about the kind of wholesome discipline that will help children to grow into happy and mature adults.

Our Children Today. *Edited by Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg and the Staff of the Child Study Association of America.*
New York: The Viking Press, 1952.

This volume is an excellent guide to the needs of children from infancy through adolescence. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with discipline and the concept of maturity.

Parent and Child. *Catherine Mackenzie.*
New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1949.

Chapters 8 and 9 of this book discuss emotional problems and discipline. Excellent techniques for guiding young people are described.

The Parents' Manual. *Anna W. M. Wolf.*
New York: Simon and Schuster. 1947.

Practical information in this volume will apply to concrete situations in the rearing and management of children.

These Are Your Children. *Gladys Gardner Jenkins, Helen Shacter, and William W. Bauer, M.D.*
Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1949.

This book will be a fresh and helpful guide to everyone faced with the job of guiding the mental, emotional, and physical development of children from infancy through adolescence.

We the Parents. *Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg.*
New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948.

This book advises parents on how they can best develop the personality of the individual child. Chapter 6, *Toward Adulthood*, discusses the problems of boys and girls who are in the process of maturing.

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