

Responsibility Age 4 Summary

Why Responsibility?

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

STEP

1



GET INPUT

Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Each time there is an opportunity, ask your child, *“What do you notice? How do you feel? How do you think the other child feels? What are you wondering?”* For example, if your child is tempted to play with their sister's markers without asking, help them notice their thoughts and reactions and the thoughts and reactions of their sister when she finds out what happened. You might even name the expressions and body language you notice.
 - *“I see you are tempted to use your sister's markers without asking her permission. I wonder how she would feel if she knew you would do this. Do you think we should ask her first?”*
- When reading books, notice when the characters are about to make responsible or irresponsible decisions. Take a moment to pause the story and ask your child, *“What do you think will happen if he makes that decision? What would you do?”* Later in the story, you can ask, *“How do you think that character is feeling? Do you think it felt good to make a responsible decision?”*
- If your child is feeling unsure about how to describe all of the feelings that occur when trying to be responsible or how others are feeling, consider asking questions, naming what you notice, and leaving plenty of quiet space after your questions so they have an opportunity to share their ideas too.
 - *“How did you feel when you first saw the markers?”*
 - *“Was there anything that made you feel worried?”*
 - *“How do you feel right now?”*
 - *“How do you think you will feel next time?”*
 - *“Is there anything we can do to remember how responsible you were today?”*
- Practicing naming feelings will enable your child to identify their feelings and others and seek support when needed. This includes describing and naming the reason they are making one choice and not another. Pointing out the responsibility that they demonstrate will help them notice it and know it is there when the next challenge arises.

**STEP
2****Teach New Skills**

- Explain why it is “ok” or “not ok” to make a certain choice. Be consistent in only allowing them to make choices that you say are ok and then helping them to begin to apply those responsibility guidelines on their own. When they make a responsible decision, show them that you noticed and tell them why you think that was a good choice. An example of an opportunity to be responsible might be deciding whether to eat all of the snacks in the big bowl or offer some to other family members and offer support when it's needed.
- Read and “pretend play” together.
 - During reading time, select a book of faces to help your child learn to identify different feelings. Point out how you can tell each face's feelings and practice recreating those cues with your child.
- Share your thoughts and feelings. Talk about what you notice, how you feel, why you feel it, and what signs you give even when uncomfortable. *“I see you are playing in the sandbox with your shoes on. Do you see my lips are frowning? I am sad you didn't listen to my instructions about taking your shoes off first. I will ask you to leave the sandbox and take your shoes off, please.”*
- Talk aloud about your big feelings. *“It made me feel so much better to tell you how I was feeling and to have you take your shoes off before playing in the sandbox.”*
- Develop pride in making responsible choices. In addition to growing these essential skills that lead your child to develop responsibility, there are beliefs and attitudes you can promote to help them, too. For example, when your child uses language that ignores someone else's feelings, like, *“I don't care if it will make him upset,”* you may respond with:
 - *“Sometimes it is difficult to help others, but I know you can do it.”*
 - *“Do you remember last time when this seemed hard? You took a deep breath and were able to do it.”*
 - *“I wonder if we can do something to help us overcome this challenge.”*

**STEP
3****Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits**

- Provide opportunities for your child to make responsible decisions that are just the right size. For example, if your child wants to color with their sister's markers, stop them before they go to get them and plan how they will ask permission first. This is much easier than waiting to mention responsibility until your child already has the markers in their hand and is ready to color with them. The goal is to come up with experiences that help them remember what it means to be responsible and are just beyond what they are comfortable with.
- Talk about responsible decisions when there is no pressure to make one. For example, you can point out how good it feels to find your book waiting in the right spot on the shelf. *“Do you remember that we put this away after we read it yesterday? It is so easy to find because we were so responsible.”*

- Provide books, dolls, and other materials at home that let children practice responsible decision-making. When you are babysitting the baby doll, make the responsible choice to change her diaper before you take her outside to play. Point out that she probably feels a lot better now, and that is what it means to be a responsible caregiver.
- Initially, practice may require more teaching, but avoid taking over and doing it for your child.

STEP
4



Support Your Child's Development and Success

- Initially, your child may need active support. Use “Show me...” statements with a positive tone and body language to express excitement and curiosity and ask them to demonstrate how to work hard toward a goal. When a child learns a new skill, they are eager to show it off! *“Show me you can make a kind decision to help everyone.”*
- Recognize effort using “I notice...” statements like: *“I noticed that you were uncertain about what to do, but you asked your friend how it would make her feel. I love seeing that you care about how your actions impact others.”*
- On days with extra challenges, when you can see your child is having difficulty making responsible decisions, offer confidence in your child's ability to calm down and try again. In a gentle, non-public way, you can say, *“I noticed you were trying to complete that task, but I know you are hungry. Let's get a snack and then come back and try later.”*
- Actively reflect on how your child is feeling when approaching challenges. You can offer reflections like:
 - *“You seem worried about forgetting to take your backpack to tomorrow's first day of preschool. Shall we put a note on the door so we won't forget?”*
 - You can also offer comfort when facing new situations to help your child gain a sense of security and face challenges rather than backing away.

STEP
5



Recognize Efforts

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

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

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

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2024). *Responsibility Age 4 Summary*. Retrieved from <https://www.ToolsforYourChildsSuccess.org>

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