



RESPONSIBILITY: Transmitting Values Rather Than Demanding Compliance

Parents everywhere are looking for ways of teaching responsibility to children. In many homes, daily chores are expected to provide the solution to this problem. In actuality, such chores, though important for teaching life skills and home management, may have no positive effect on creating a sense of responsibility.

The plain fact is that responsibility cannot be imposed. It can only grow from within, fed and directed by values absorbed at home and in the community. Responsibility that is not anchored in positive values can be antisocial and destructive. Gang members often show greatly loyalty and strong responsibility in relation to one another and their gang. Terrorists take their duties in dead earnest; they carry out commands, even if they involve sacrificing their own lives.

While we wish our children to be responsible persons, we want their responsibility to spring from ultimate values, among which are reverence for life and concern for human welfare: in familiar words, compassion, commitment, and caring.

Children's inner emotional reaction to our instruction is a decisive element in how much they learn of what we want them to know. Values cannot be taught directly. They are absorbed, and become part of the child, only through identification with, and emulation of, persons who gain his or her love and respect.

The problem of responsibility in children is referred back to the parent, or more precisely to the parent's values as expressed in child-rearing practices that enhance loving feelings between parent and child.

Character education depends on our relationship with our children and that character traits cannot be transmitted by words but must be conveyed by actions.

The first step in the long-term program is a determination to become interested in what children are thinking and feeling, and respond not just to their behavior, their outward compliance or rebellion, but to the feelings that trigger that behavior.

All we need is an ear to listen, an eye to behold, and a heart to feel.

Our inner motto is: Let me understand. Let me show that I understand. Let me show in words that do not criticize or condemn.

Taken from "Between Parent and Child" by Dr. Haim G. Ginott (revised and updated by Dr. Alice Ginott & Dr. H. Wallace Goddard.)

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