

Volunteer Insights

Inspiring Catholic Faith and Principles While Encouraging Academic Excellence

Summer 2009

The Fourth "R" for School is Responsibility

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

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

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

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

Student Responsibility Quiz:

Do I Take Responsibility for My Learning and Behavior?

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

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

How did your child do?

Seven or more *yes* answers is very good. Five is average. Fewer than three *yes* answers indicates real improvement is needed. Talk with your child about how they did and ways in which they may improve on these results.

Quick Thoughts.....

Picture This

Good readers form mental pictures as they read. To improve your youngster's comprehension, read a book without letting him see it. Then, ask him to guess what the illustrations look like.

Raising Good Sports

You can teach your child to be a good sport by being one yourself. When you attend a game, clap and cheer for players who try hard, even if they're on the other team. You'll help your youngster learn to be gracious to everyone in the game.

Listen up!

Having trouble getting your child's attention? Here's an idea teachers often use in the classroom. Rather than yelling, talk softly or even whisper. Chances are, your youngsters will quiet down to hear what you're saying.

Internet safety

Here are two important tips to keep your youngsters safe on the Internet. Tell them to open e-mails only from people they know. Also, they should never give out information about themselves on the Web. Never share information about your school, age, address, phone numbers or other personal information.

Where in the world?

Instead of throwing away opened mail, save it for geography practice. Give your child the envelope and ask her to look at the postmark. Can they locate the city on a map or tell you two facts about the state?

Tasty math

For some hands-on geometry practice, invite your youngster into the kitchen. Together, cut sandwiches into triangles, try to slice a pan of brownies into equal squares, or discuss how to divide a pizza among an odd number of people.

Helping Kids Be Themselves

Our children face a lot of challenges, such as trying to be popular and successful at school and maintaining a good relationship with their families. The pressures to achieve these goals are enormous. At the same time children also have the pressure of just trying to fit in with their peers. There is almost nothing worse for a child than to be singled out as being different from everyone else. That can result in taunting, bullying, and being ostracized from social networks and activities.

We can see the effort children make every day to look, talk, dress, and act like everybody else. Sometimes they do it to be popular, but mostly they are just trying to fit in.

Often this attempt to appear like everyone else can have the effect of turning them into somebody else. They can lose the ability not only to express themselves in appearance, but also to think and act independently. This can lead to many difficulties such as a loss of self-confidence or self-esteem.

Parents have a crucial role to play in helping children be themselves and be true to their own values and beliefs. Even as we gently nudge our children toward the path we would like them to choose and the people we would like them to be, we also have to recognize their individuality and encourage them to be their unique selves. With the pressure they receive at school to conform with friends, they just don't need a similar push to conform at home.

We have to find ways to let children express their individuality at home so they will feel confident enough to stay strong when they interact with others. This doesn't mean allowing lax or inappropriate behavior, but it does mean celebrating and acknowledging their differences and uniqueness, even within the family unit. We can also provide solid direction and guidance so that they can find their own path and individuality within acceptable social and family norms.

This is not an easy challenge for many parents to meet, but if you can help your children find their way to fulfilling their destiny, they will feel good about themselves and confident in their abilities to succeed. You can also reinforce the message that just fitting in will never be good enough to allow them to reach their full potential. Each person needs to be not just himself or herself, but the best self he or she can be.

Making School #1

Sometimes it can be hard to keep children focused on school. What can you do to make school a top priority for your kids? Keep these simple ideas in mind—they're useful at any time of the year.

Make attendance job #1. Let your youngsters know that unless they're sick, they must go to school. Try to schedule routine dentist and doctor appointments after school hours. If possible, take family vacations during school breaks. Give your child an award for perfect attendance each month. Try a "Job Well Done" certificate or a coupon good for a night of bowling or a movie.

Show you care. Want your child to know that you're interested in their learning? Talk about their school activities and projects. Attend as many school events as you can. If homework and after-school activities conflict, speak up: "I know you have baseball practice this evening, but homework comes first. After you finish, I'll take you to practice."

Keep it upbeat. Try to set a positive example for your children, even when your own day has been difficult. Instead of saying, "I had a hard day at work. I'll never get my project done," try, "Work was hard today, but I made some progress on my project." If you show a positive attitude about your work, your youngsters may feel better about their own.