
READY for SCHOOL Parent News:
Building Responsibility

One of the key skills that children need in preparation for school is a sense of responsibility – understanding that the completion of specific tasks is their job. Learning goal-orientation is part of this process. Developing a sense of responsibility early, will help children later in school when they have homework to complete or are trying to figure out how to manage their time for a longer term project to be completed over several weeks.

Unlike many adults, most children have not yet built a sense of obligation or drudgery around work. They love the idea of being involved in meaningful tasks. They are intrigued by getting to do some of the things they see the adults around them doing. What could be more fun for a toddler than trying to manage a push broom, or for a preschooler to don his/her bathing suit and help a grandparent wash the car. While miniature versions of rakes or brooms are fun, children also really enjoy getting to use the real thing. Involving children in real work from an early age helps build a sense of competence and responsibility.

The language of goal orientation and task completion may be helpful to children as they move towards school. Giving choices is always a plus. For example, on Saturday morning, you could say, “Today I have to buy groceries, clean the bathroom and weed the garden. I would love your help. Would you like to check off (pictured) items on the grocery list as we find them or locate the items on the shelves?” Or, “I’ll show you which plants are weeds. Then you can find the weeds and pull them out.” For some of us, a “to do” list keeps us on track. You could help your child make his/her own “to do” list to build writing and organization skills. Others may not want or need the structure of a “to do” or family job chart. The pleasure of doing will be enough.

Modeling responsibility can encourage positive behaviors in our children. While we may not always feel enthusiastic about work ourselves, if children sometimes see us showing enjoyment in the work of daily life, they are more likely to adopt a similar attitude. Talk to children about how you use planning in your daily life. “I have a big project that I am doing for work. It doesn’t have to be done for five days, but I started on it today so that I will have enough time to get it done on time.”

And while the word “responsibility” has a serious tone for most of us, find ways to incorporate fun in daily chores. Probably the floor your toddler sweeps will look worse after he is done but, what a great photo opportunity or while washing the car, don’t be surprised if the hose wanders from the car to you. Part of learning about responsibility is coming to understand that responsibility does not have to be a chore but can be a wonderful tool to help children be successful in school and life.