



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

Parent as Mentor, Part 6 **MENTOR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Abigail Van Buren, newspaper columnist of *Dear Abby* fame said, **“If you want children to keep their feet on the ground, put some responsibility on their shoulders.”** That is a wisdom statement! Responsibility is more than duties or chores or projects. It includes accepting ownership for one’s choices and the results of action or inaction.

Responsibility is crucial to the development of positive self-esteem. Brooker T. Washington expressed it this way: **“Few things help an individual more than to place responsibility upon him, and to let him know that you trust him.”** Children thrive from age-appropriate responsibility. Autonomy, self-reliance, and willpower (all synonyms for responsibility) result when children make it a habit to fulfill responsibilities, accept accountability, and practice self-control. That’s what is meant by the mantra: **“Name it! Claim it! Tame it!”**

NAME IT – Be specific. Identify the goal or task or expectation.

CLAIM IT – Accept ownership. State what you will do about the task or, if time has passed, what you did do, or what you should have done in regards to the issue.

TAME IT – Prescribe action or antidote. If you successfully completed the targeted task, name what virtue you employed, for instance, self-control, persistence, flexibility, etc. This affirms proactive practices that are life-giving and which deserve to be acted upon often. If you failed at the task or performed unsatisfactorily, name how you would approach this task in the future in order to achieve satisfaction. For instance, “I will organize my time differently,” “I will ask for help when I am confused,” “I will put my duty before my leisure activity.” Activate self-control.

American journalist and novelist Joan Didion remarked: **“The willingness to accept responsibility for one's own life is the source from which self-respect springs.”** Made in the image of God, it is only when we are living true to our God-nature that we develop a positive self-concept that no person or circumstance can take from us. How easy it is to shift blame; how character building to acknowledge liability or express accountability for the choice and for the result of action or inaction. This does not come easily. Responsibility must be mentored through word and example.

MENTORING MOMENTS

Mentoring moments arise spontaneously. How helpful it would be if parents housed in their “spiritual pocket” just the right slogan to highlight the value or definition of *responsibility*. The wisdom words that you repeat on occasions are mentoring mantras. What are your one-liner thoughts about responsibility? Consider posting an aphorism above a doorway or on a family mirror. Display the thought on a mini-easel placed on top of the family TV or prayer table or food table. Mantras repeated at the right time shape attitudes and actions. Perhaps the following quotations will be helpful or lead you to create your own.

- "It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." (Fictional Character, Albus Dumbledore)
- "Ninety-nine percent of all failures come from people who have a habit of making excuses." (George Washington Carver)
- "If you mess up, 'fess up." (Author Unknown)
- "When you blame others, you give up your power to change." (Author Unknown)
- "You must take personal responsibility. You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind, but you can change yourself." (Jim Rohn, Business Philosopher)
- "I believe that every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity, an obligation; every possession, a duty." (John D. Rockefeller, Jr.)

RESPONSE-ABILITY

Response-bility—the **ability to respond**—develops with consistent practice of the following kinds of behaviors:

- completing tasks without needing supervision or rewards
- making a choice and seeing it through to completion
- demonstrating accountability for choices and consequences (rather than whining or blaming others)
- displaying respectful assertiveness

Respectfully assertive children confidently state how they feel or think, without putting down the other person. “I Messages,” a technique that is useful to this process, consists of four parts: (1) **WHEN . . .** (state the behavior), (2) **I FEEL . . .** (state the feeling), (3) **BECAUSE . . .** (state the consequence), (4) **I NEED . . .** (state a proactive solution). For example, “**When** trash is left on the lunch table **I feel** taken for granted **because** I am left to clean up the mess that others make. **I need** you to clear your table space before leaving the table.” A helpful article on the topic of respectful assertiveness is available at <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/W00005.html>

Dr. Patricia McCormack, IHM, a former Catholic schoolteacher and catechist, is a formation education consultant, an author of several books as well as the PARENT PARTNERSHIP HANDBOOK feature of *Today's Catholic Teacher*, and director of **IHM Formative Support for Parents and Teachers**, Arlington, VA. She speaks and writes frequently on topics of child formation. *Reach her at* DrPatMcCormack@aol.com.

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