

Respect & Responsibility



As a parent, you want your teenager to be both respectful and responsible. Together, these important character traits not only make a teen more pleasant to live with—they can enhance her self-esteem and help her succeed in school, at work, and beyond. Here are ways to encourage respect and responsibility in your child.

Respect yourself

People who respect themselves believe others should treat them well, and they in turn are more likely to treat others with respect.

Expect respect. Let your child know that she deserves to be respected by friends. For example, she should be able to share opinions without being made fun of. Or she should be able to make her own decisions about where to spend time or with whom—without being criticized for her choices. Together, make a list of ways that people can show respect for each other. She can use that as a measure for whether her relationships are respectful ones.

Consider yourself. When your teen stands up for her beliefs or says no to things that make her uncomfortable, she is showing self-respect. Also, she demonstrates respect for

herself when she gives her best to her commitments, including schoolwork, after-school activities, or a part-time job. For instance, doing homework carefully and arriving for her job on time show that she takes pride in her work.



Respect others

When your teen is respectful of others, it can help him connect better with siblings, peers, teachers, and bosses.

Show respect. Your child should think about how his actions—and his words—affect others. Do they make people feel valued? For instance, is he honest and direct with his friends, rather than talking behind their backs or putting them down in front of others? Does he demonstrate respect for your privacy by keeping family confidences? Encourage him to think about who he respects and what traits those people have. That will help him understand what respect looks and feels like.

Model what you mean. Your teenager will learn best by following your example. Try to let him see you being respectful to others by listening politely when people disagree with you. Also, you can demonstrate respect for your child by following through on your promises to him or apologizing when you make a mistake. If he is disrespectful, you have another chance to model respect. Focus on his behavior in a calm way (“I don’t like the way you are speaking to me”) rather than attacking him (“You are so rude!”). He will see that you can disagree with someone in a respectful way.

Tip: Reinforce the behavior that you would like to see by showing that you notice when he behaves respectfully. For example, if he tells you he was upset when you mentioned his grades in front of his aunt, you might say, “I really appreciate your waiting until we got home to talk about it. I’m sure that was hard for you not to say something then. Let’s discuss it now.”



Be a good sport

Student athletes who treat opponents, teammates, coaches, and officials with dignity are always winners. Share these ways your child can show respect on the field or court:

- Shake hands with opponents before a game. After the game, shake hands or give high fives and nicely say, “Good game.”



- Accept officials’ calls gracefully.
- Play by the rules, regardless of whether actions can be seen from the sidelines.
- Avoid “trash talking” to opponents or “showboating” (victory dances, bragging).

You can also set an example of respectful behaviors for your teen when you’re watching a sporting event. How?

- Offer encouragement (“Way to go!”), and refrain from booing or making insults or negative remarks.
- Be polite to opposing teams and their fans (say hello, congratulate them on a win).
- Clap for good plays even if your child is not the one who made them.
- Discuss concerns with your teen’s coach privately, rather than in front of your child or other fans.

on. If something breaks, he should make sure it gets fixed.

Note: He should also take care of others’ belongings. If he borrows something from a friend or relative, he should return it on time—and in the same condition it was in when he got it.

Take personal responsibility. Your child should know that he is responsible for the choices he makes—and for accepting the consequences for those decisions. Point out that as your child gets older, he is more and more responsible for his own happiness, too. Suggest that he consider his own strengths and abilities and use them to plan for the future. Also, encourage him to take care of his body by getting enough sleep (at least 8–9 hours), eating nutritious foods, and being physically active for an hour a day.

Responsible to others

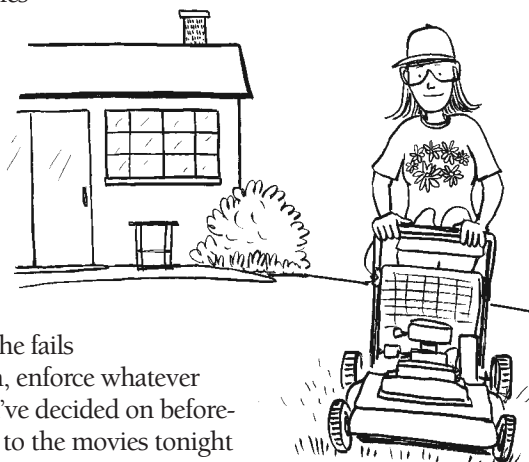
Being dependable means behaving in a way that allows others to rely on you.

Hold her accountable. If your adolescent forgets about chores or lets duties

slide, you might remind her with a simple phrase (“Lawn”) or simply point to what needs to be done (lawn that needs to be mowed). But don’t do the job for her. Then, if she fails to follow through, enforce whatever consequence you’ve decided on beforehand (“No going to the movies tonight since you didn’t finish your chores”).

For regular chores or responsibilities, you might consider writing a plan and having her sign it. (“I will clean my bathroom by Sunday night each week. I understand I won’t be able to use the computer until it’s done.”) That way, you both know what’s expected.

Point out the impact. You might shed light on how being responsible benefits your teen. When she shows you she can take care of responsibilities, she earns your trust and perhaps more freedom. Also, you could discuss how her actions affect others if she fails to follow through. For example, if she promises a club advisor to set up a meeting and doesn’t do it, the club may not be able to register for an important event. That affects everyone in the club and could also influence her relationships with her peers.



Responsible to yourself

Being a responsible individual starts with your teen being responsible to himself.

Care for belongings. Whether it’s electronics, textbooks, or bedroom furniture, encourage your teen to be responsible for his things. He might put items away when he stops using them so they don’t get lost or stepped



High School Years