

4-24-09

One common concern expressed by both teachers and parents at third quarter conferences was homework completion – how to make sure students are accepting this responsibility. Raising a child means more than helping him or her grow up healthy and happy. It's important that, by the time they're ready to leave home, children have learned to be self-sufficient and responsible. Those kinds of lessons take an entire childhood to learn, but they're among the most important lessons you can pass on to your children. The following are suggestions from the National Association of Elementary School Principals to help raise responsible children:

Make them calendar girls (and boys). Give your child his or her own calendar. Have children mark when a test or project is due, or when a sports or group activity is scheduled. Each child's calendar should be posted in a visible spot, and get them in the habit of checking it every day – either adding new events and deadlines or crossing off things they've completed.

Keeping track. As tempting as it is to bail out your children if they forget their lunch or homework or put off an assignment until too late, those mistakes can be excellent tools to teach responsibility. If your child needs to borrow lunch money, make sure it is paid back from his or her own savings. If the project is due the next day, fight the urge to step in and get it done. Children only need a few such lessons, and some serious follow-up discussions from their families and teachers, to realize that it's not worth it to be irresponsible.

Helping others. No matter what your child's situation in life, there always are others in greater need. Get your child involved in helping those less fortunate by working through community, school, or religious groups that focus on community service. Show that you believe in what you're teaching by volunteering yourself as well.

Pet smarts. Taking care of the family pet is an excellent way to learn responsibility. Children quickly learn the consequences if they forget to take the dog out, forget to feed the cat, or let a caged pet stay out unattended. Your children need to know that their pets depend on them.

Get to work. Assign weekly chores to everyone in the house, rotating them so that, eventually, everyone has a turn at doing the dishes, putting away laundry, and taking out the trash. Divide the jobs by age, with older children doing the harder jobs, and make sure to never list anything as a "girl" job or a "boy" job.

Save for the future. Financial responsibility is easy to teach if you start when your children are young. From their very first birthday money, teach them to set aside a certain amount for the future. A good rule of thumb is to put half away for savings and save half for spending, either on things they want right away or things they'd like to buy in the future.

Consider matching funds. If your children are saving for something that's a big-ticket item, consider setting up a matching fund, where, if they earn the first half, you'll chip in the second. Even though it sounds like the same concept as saying you'll split the cost with them, it's actually more effective to have them demonstrate to you first that they've worked and saved enough to pay for their share.

Finally, remember that the only way to teach your children responsibility is to model the behavior yourself. Make sure they know that they can depend on you to follow through on promises. Help them see that you value your contributions to your job, your community, and your family.

Have a wonderful week! And remember to take some time to read to or with your child every day and to have fun with math activities!