

# Building Responsibility with Teenagers



Winnie Grams

Graduate student

Responsibility is something most

teens struggle with. What

low self-esteem among teens if it is appropriate to their age and maturity.

How can you assist your teen in developing responsibility? In this newsletter, we share a few ideas on how to help build responsibility for your teen both inside and outside your home. We also will give you some ideas to build responsibility even if you have been separated from your teen and have not yet reconnected.

## What Does Being Responsible Mean?

To begin with, you and your teen must share an understanding of what being responsible means. You may have differing ideas of responsibility. For example, if a teenager takes the family car out for the evening, the teen's idea of being responsible might be that the car will not end up in a parking lot. A

In this newsletter, we share some ideas on how to help build responsibility for your teen both inside and outside your home.

decisions, what to do, what to select and how to deal with increased responsibility and balancing responsibilities with being responsible. For example, that teens can feel the effects of war and seek in their lives and parents work on responsibility.

Parents can encourage teens when they are struggling and help them to deal with their own responsibilities.

family responsibilities and appreciation of their valuable contributions.

Responsibility can lead your teen to having a closer relationship because it can increase mutual respect and appreciation. Further,

expect

chores) and avoiding other things (such as not driving faster than the speed limit or using marijuana). Spend a little time on the following exercise, and then invite your teen to respond to the same questions. Compare your answers and see what you learn.

**Parent**

• To me, being responsible means:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

• To be responsible, you (teenager) will do (list four specific things):

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

• To be responsible, you (teenager) will not do (list four specific things):

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Teen**

• To me, being responsible means:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

• To be responsible, I (teenager) will do (list four specific things):

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

• To be responsible, I (teenager) will not do (list four specific things):

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

## Building Responsibility at Home

Helping your teen build responsibility starts at home. The home often is the first place teens learn responsibility for themselves and others. They may learn responsibility through family chores, such as taking out the garbage, cleaning their room or making their own meals.

The level of responsibility your teen will have depends on his or her age and ability, as well as your family circumstances. Since every teen is different, remembering that not all teens will have the same level of responsibility is important.

Helping them learn responsibility, but not expecting them to bear responsibilities beyond their ability, such as constantly being in charge of other younger children, also is important. Responsibility levels that are too intense for teenagers can lead to resentment, frustration and depression.

You have many ways you can encourage your teen to become responsible in your home. For example, making sure your teen knows and obeys the house rules, completes family chores and treats family members with respect are ways that encourage your teen to be responsible. Your teen also might enjoy responsibilities and learn more when those responsibilities are done as a family, when this is possible.

**The home often is the first place teens learn responsibility for themselves and others**

## The Family Chore Box

A good way to build responsibility and also spend family time would be to make a family chore box. Here are some steps to follow for making a family chore box:

**Step 1:**

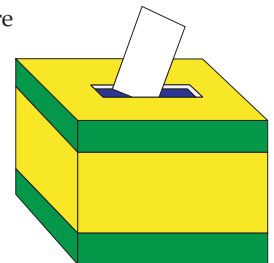
Find an old box, container or jar that you can use to contain pieces of paper.

**Step 2:**

Have each family member write down some different chores that need to be done around the house, such as “vacuum living room,” “wash dishes” or “take out garbage.” Make sure you write down things that will clean parts of the house in which everyone lives. Let each person clean his or her own bedroom.

**Step 3:**

Cut up the paper so each chore is on a small piece of paper.



**Step 4:**

Place the chores in the box, and have each family member pick two chores every week.

The family chore box encourages everyone to help around the house. These should be chores that help create a positive living space for all family members. The chore box also gives your teen a variety of chores in which to participate. This will help him or her gain experience in different tasks and add some variety. These are chores that parents should do with teens, and provide support and direction as needed. Learning responsibility by using a family chore box is more fun for teens when it contains a variety of chores. Learning responsibility also is more fun for them when they know they are doing a good job and are appreciated!

The family chore box is just one way of helping your teen build responsibility in your home. Your teen has many other things to do to become more responsible. Again, just make sure each responsibility matches your teenager's age and ability. Here are some additional ideas for building responsibility at home:

- Show your teen how to do laundry or fold and put away clothes.
- If you have a pet, let your teen feed it or take it for a walk.
- Show your teen how to cook a meal for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Schedule times together when the teen can cook a meal for family members with your support.
- Create a space and time for your teen to do homework after school.
- Show your teen how to water the plants.
- Work with your teen to do a significant job, such as changing the oil in the car or planting a garden.

## Building Responsibility Outside the Home

Learning responsibility at home helps prepare teens for the real world. Teens will need to learn the skills and responsibility that enable them to enter the world as adults and find success. As teens grow and mature, parents also can help them build responsibility through experiences outside the home.

Your teen has many ways to be responsible outside the home:



- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| Shovel snow    | Mow grass        |
| Rake leaves    | Baby-sit         |
| Deliver papers | Volunteer work   |
| Dog walking    | After-school job |



Such responsibilities can give your teenager experience in working outside the home, meeting new people and earning money.

When your teen seeks responsibilities outside the home for the first time, you might want to go with him or her to help find things to do. For example, walk with your teen to your neighbor's house or a local store. Help the teen find ways to be responsible. Some teens will need help preparing for a job interview, filling out a job application or making a schedule of available time.

Having their first job or helping others outside their home can be exciting for teens. Make sure you remember to tell your teen how responsible he or she is becoming and how proud you are of him or her!

Responsibility is a two-way street. Developing responsibility is difficult for teenagers if they feel parents are not being responsible as well. Teens learn responsibility from adult role models. When you act in responsible ways, your teen likely will follow. For example, if you want your teen to avoid using drugs or alcohol, then you should avoid using them. If you don't, your teen will have a hard time understanding why you say one thing and then do another.

You have many things you might do during the day that are responsible, such as going to work, paying the bills, driving courteously, avoiding swearing or foul language, cleaning your room and getting groceries. All the small, everyday activities show your teen you are a responsible adult.

## Teens learn responsibility from adult role models

Make a list of 10 things you have done today or this past week to show your teen an example of being a responsible adult. This might help your teen see what responsibility is and give him or her an idea of what being a responsible person means.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

## Building Responsibility Before Reconnecting with Your Teen

If you haven't connected with your teen yet, you still can think and talk about building responsibility. You can discuss the items in this newsletter with your teen on the phone or write your teen a letter. Here are some other ways to discuss issues of responsibility with your teen before being connected with him or her again. You also can talk about these ideas, even if your teen is in your home.

- Tell your teen about your first job. What did you like about it? Do you hope your teen can have the same type of experience?
- Tell your teen about the family chores you had to do. Did you get paid? How often did you have to do chores? What did this teach you?
- Share some experiences you remember about your teen being responsible. Remind your teen how proud you were of him or her. This will make your teen feel positive and encourage him or her to be responsible.

---

## Conclusion

If these techniques are not working for your family, seek additional help through other resources. Valuable resources include your support systems, such as family, friends, neighbors and community professionals. Helpful information always is available in books, newsletters, classes and through family counseling or therapy. Counseling can provide families with additional tools to overcome difficult times.

---

## Helpful Phone Numbers

**North Dakota Helpline**  
211 or (800) 472-2911

Or call your local NDSU Extension Service county office to find phone numbers for agencies that can assist you.

\* Regional Parent Resource Centers with the NDSU Extension Service also have information available to provide phone numbers of other agencies to assist you. A local NDSU Extension agent can provide information for you as well.

---

## Helpful Resources for Parents

Visit the Web site [www.yoursocialworker.com/p-articles/raising-teens.htm](http://www.yoursocialworker.com/p-articles/raising-teens.htm) to find information on raising responsible teenagers by reading an article written by Gary Direnfeld, MSW.

---

## References

Taylor, S., T. Field, R. Yando, K.P. Gonzalez, J. Harding, D. Lasko, C. Mueller and D. Bendell, (1997). Adolescents' perceptions of family responsibility-taking. *Adolescence*, 32 (128), 969-977.

This newsletter may be copied for noncommercial, educational purposes in its entirety with no changes. Requests to use any portion of the document (including text, graphics or photos) should be sent to [permission@ndsuent.nodak.edu](mailto:permission@ndsuent.nodak.edu). Include exactly what is requested for use and how it will be used.

**For more information on this and other topics, see: [www.ag.ndsu.edu](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu)**