

NEWSLETTER

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RESPONSIBILITY

Our new president uses the word “responsibility” a lot. President Obama reminds us that government can’t do it all, each citizen has a responsibility to work hard as well. The synergy of responsible, accountable government and responsible, accountable citizens is what has made America great in the past and will do so again.

I use the word a lot too when I talk with parents. I know that responsible parenting means parents provide what I call the Three Rs to their children: RESPECT, RESPONSIBILITY, AND REASON. (See ParentTip: Raising Responsible Children II).

Bottom line: All parents have a responsibility to raise their children to be responsible so they grow up to be responsible citizens.

Just how does a parent do that? A newborn baby doesn’t know beans about responsibility. But the baby starts learning about responsibility when the parent lovingly meets the baby’s needs. The baby feels good when it is fed and changed and cuddled. The baby feels CONNECTED to another human being. This good and connected feeling starts the lesson. Primates like baboons groom each to feel good and maintain connection to others in their troupe working together for the safety of all. Ultimately responsibility means not letting another person (or baboon) down and connectedness helps make us want to be responsible.

Parents also model responsible behavior. Children see that their parents do what is expected of them and keep their word so others trust them. Children learn quite a bit about responsibility by osmosis. They absorb the way responsible mothers and fathers act. At school children learn still more about responsibility from teachers and peers. They begin to figure out that people are different and some are more responsible than others.

Wise parents start chores early so their kids can practice being responsible. And wise parents also make use of “parent propaganda” so if the family sees an example of irresponsible behavior say on TV they talk about it with the kids. “Our family would never do that!”

It takes a while but I note that parents take pride in children who are responsible and gripe about the ones who aren’t. There’s a lesson here.