

8 Ways to Instill Accountability in Teens

The definition of “accountable” is taking responsibility for one’s actions, and it is something every parent hopes their teen will be. When parents teach their kids to take responsibility for their decisions and actions, they help them develop into conscientious human beings and responsible citizens of the community. Without accountability, teenagers blame others, refuse to follow rules they find unfair, and find ways to justify their behavior regardless of the impact on others.

So, if we all want to raise accountable teenagers, why are there so many teens and young adults who seem to lack this valuable attribute? Instilling accountability is simply not an easy task. It’s a long process that requires patience and diplomacy. Many times, it will appear that our hard work is not achieving any results, which can make some parents give up. But take heart! It is possible to raise accountable teenagers in our modern society, and if you don’t give up, you will eventually see your teen develop into a responsible adult.

Here are the top 8 ways to instill accountability in your teenagers:

1. **Demonstrate personal responsibility.**

Role modeling is the most effective tool parents have for teaching their teens anything. Any value you want your teen to have, simply demonstrate it in your everyday life. So if you want your teen to take responsibility for their actions, you should do the same. Avoid blaming others. Follow rules, and don’t avoid the consequences if you break them. If you make a mistake, admit it, apologize, and make amends if possible. For example, if you accidentally bang the door of the car next to you in the parking lot, then leave a note!

2. **Create a culture of accountability in your family.**

Your family has its own culture that reflects your values, expectations, rules, and hopes. If you want an accountable teen, then each member of your family must be responsible for their own actions and behaviors, each family member must be responsible for following rules and expectations, and each must be responsible for how they respond to stressful or frustrating situations. No one in the family should be allowed to change the rules to fit their own needs or feelings.

3. **Establish boundaries.**

You must provide your children clear and firm rules and expectations, so that they are aware of the consequences of their actions. Your teen must know that if they choose to break the rules, there will be a consequence for that choice. Of course, this only works if you don’t give in or give up just because your teen whines or promises to behave. You must see the consequence through in order to see the behavior change.

4. **Be involved in their life.**

Research consistently shows that teens with involved parents are more likely to be responsible and do better in school and less likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as drugs, crime and sex. Establish open, friendly, honest communication with your children from a young age. Learn about their interests and attend their activities. Showing that you care about and support your teen helps them feel valued, and this in turn makes them more eager to engage with you and want to please you.

5. But don't be overinvolved.

There is a fine line between showing your teen that you support them and micromanaging their lives. As parents, many of us do things for our kids today that we were able and expected to do for ourselves when we were children. Our parents didn't often feel the need to negotiate with our sports coach, solve our every problem, or entertain us in our free time. We should let our teens manage their own lives.

6. Refrain from rescuing your teen.

It is so painful for us, as parents, to watch our children go through difficult circumstances, and we typically want to jump in and fix things. While this is a natural reaction of wanting to protect someone we love, it is actually one of the worst things you can do as a parent. When your child is a teenager, your role becomes more of a coach. You want to guide and support your teen through their difficulty while still allowing them to discover their own capabilities. If we step in, we stop the learning process and deprive our teen from developing the courage needed to try new things and solve problems. Your teen needs to learn now – before they leave your home as a young adult – how to manage obstacles in life, and they need to have experience overcoming a difficulty on their own so that they gain confidence in themselves and realize they are capable. When you rescue your teen, you are inadvertently communicating to them that you don't think they can handle challenges, and your teen will begin to doubt their own abilities. Your teen will learn to expect that others will take care of things for them, and they will become a master of avoiding challenges, instead of facing them.

7. Allow natural consequences.

No matter how painful, you must let your teen be responsible for the good and bad decisions they have made. It might feel cruel, but it is actually the very best parenting you can offer. If a teen gets a ticket for speeding, he should pay the fine, not you. If he doesn't have the money, he will need to find a way to earn it or lose his license. If your teen procrastinates on a big project, do not do the project for them! If your teen didn't prepare for an exam, don't make excuses to the teacher and beg for a second chance. Let them receive the bad grade and handle the results. This way kids will learn how to take responsibility for their actions and deal with the consequences.

8. Praise them when they demonstrate responsibility.

Positive reinforcement of any actions your teen takes to show responsibility will encourage them to continue the behavior. Never underestimate the power of a compliment.

Reference

Middle Earth-Partnering with Youth for Responsible Adulthood September 2017