

RESPONSIBILITY

LESSON THIRTEEN

Follow-up (As a family discuss the assignment for the lesson Open Communication.)

1. Have we been sharing our feelings in a more open way to family members? How? When?
2. How have we been more kind and understanding when family members try to communicate openly and honestly?

Concept

One of the most important things we can learn in this life is to take responsibility for our own thoughts, words and actions. An American president's wife, Eleanor Roosevelt, spoke about this when she said, "No one can offend me without my permission." We can choose what we think and how we act.

When we take responsibility for our thoughts, words and actions, we don't let other people make us angry. We wouldn't say, "You make me angry!" because no one makes us angry. We can choose to be in control of our emotions.

When we're responsible, we no longer blame others, the weather or our memory. For example, we wouldn't say things like, "It's not my fault, I forgot!" If something goes wrong, we can explain, but we make no excuses. If we make a mistake, we take responsibility for it. We admit when we're wrong.

Linda Kavelin Papov, in her book The Family Virtues Guide, described responsibility well: "Being responsible means that others can depend on you. Being responsible means to do something well and to the best of your ability. Being responsible is being willing to be accountable for what you do or don't do. You accept credit when you do things right (humbly, of course!) and accept correction when things go wrong. When you are responsible, you keep your agreements. If you agree to do something for your family or for a friend, you don't put it off or forget about it. You make sure it gets done. Being responsible is the ability to respond ably."

Additionally, children learn responsibility by doing as much as possible for themselves. As young children accomplish even the smallest things, older children and parents should praise them and their ability to do things for themselves. Parents, the fewer things we do for our children, the

more time we'll have to do things with them.

Family Survey Review

Statement #13. We take responsibility for our own mistakes.

- When something goes wrong, is it easy to blame others?
- Instead of blaming others, what should we say and do?

Story

Just over the six-foot fence in Jason's backyard was a parking lot for an apartment building. Someone had tossed a paper bag of empty beer bottles from the parking lot over the fence into Jason's backyard where he had found them. Jason took the bottles and tossed them, one by one, back over the fence. Since he couldn't see through the fence, he couldn't see them land, but he could hear the crash each time a bottle broke in the parking lot. It was kind of fun.

That evening a man from the apartments rang the doorbell, and Jason, who was downstairs, overheard the man telling his father about a punctured tire. Jason went quietly into his room, quickly put on his pajamas, got in bed, and pretended to be asleep.

His parents, after reassuring the neighbor they would pay for the tire if it turned out to be their son's doing, sat down to decide how to handle the incident. They realized that they had three challenges: (1) to help Jason tell the truth about the matter (they knew him well enough to be pretty sure what the truth was); (2) to help him feel sorry for what he'd done; and (3) to help him feel enough responsibility for his actions that he wouldn't do something similarly irresponsible in the future. As they thought about it, they realized that it was fortunate the whole thing had come to their attention after Jason was in bed when they had time to think it through, rather than in his presence. Otherwise they might have confronted him without turning it into a learning experience.

When Jason came to breakfast the next morning, Dad said, "Son, I noticed that sack of beer bottles. Whoever tossed them into our yard shouldn't have done it, should he?"

Jason looked up with a little hope in his eyes and answered, "No."

Dad said, "You probably felt like tossing them back over and didn't really stop to think that they might hurt someone or break something." Jason looked down, but said nothing. "Did you throw them over, son?"

There was a pause, then a quiet, "Yes."

"We're proud of you for telling the truth, son. A man's car ran over one of those bottles and got a flat tire. We're lucky none of the bottles broke a windshield. But we do need to decide what to do about that flat tire. Do you feel sorry about throwing those bottles and puncturing the tire?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to take responsibility for what you did?"

"Yes."

Solutions FOR FAMILIES

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Jason cleaned up the rest of the glass. He saved money from working for three weeks to pay for the tire. He apologized to the car's owner. He promised both his parents and the car owner that he would never throw anything over the fence again. Jason made restitution and took responsibility for his actions.

Discussion

1. How did Jason take responsibility for his actions?
2. How do we feel when we take responsibility for our words and actions?

Activity

First, we'll answer the following questions. They'll help us realize that our daily decisions show how responsible we are.

Ask:

1. What would you do if you broke something in our home?
2. What if you had a family job to do, and your friend asked you to go swimming?
3. What if your teacher gave you a math assignment that you didn't understand, and it was to be finished the next day. What would you do?
4. What if you were tending a neighbor's child who was in the bathtub when the phone rang?

Second, we'll do one (or both) of the activities on the following pages:

1. Ten-Minute Pick-Up
2. The Honey-Do Jar

Assignment

1. During the coming weeks make a special effort to take responsibility for your own thoughts, words and actions.
2. If time allows, read the Additional Solution for Success included with this lesson:
Learning To Make Responsible Decisions.

ACTIVITY

THE TEN-MINUTE PICK-UP

All family members have a responsibility to keep the home clean. The following activity is a fun way for family members to combine their energies, get household chores done faster, and feel good about doing their part.

Activity

1. *Assign family members to “work stations” (areas of the house that need cleaning).*
1. *Be sure everyone has what they need for cleaning--vacuum cleaner, broom, sponge, etc.*
2. *Set the timer for 10 or 15 minutes and shout “On your mark, get set, CLEAN!”*
3. *Family members are to work quickly and efficiently at their stations to get as much done as possible before the buzzer goes off. If someone finishes early, he or she should run to another station and help someone else.*
4. *As soon as time is up, allow a few moments for any last-minute cleaning. Then stand back and join in a round of applause everyone who helped accomplish a marvelous job in such a short time!*

ACTIVITY

HONEY-DO JAR

Dividing household chores among all family members is a good way for children to learn responsibility. This activity guarantees children will have a chance to do every chore at least once. This is a fair way to distribute housekeeping responsibilities and a good way to prepare children to be on their own someday.

Activity

5. *Schedule a family meeting to:*
 - *Make a list of chores (inside and out) that family members can do.*
 - *Put a “W” next to weekly chores.*
 - *Put a “D” next to daily chores.*
 - *Put an “M” next to monthly chores.*
6. *Cut construction paper into “chore” strips. Write one chore per strip as follows:*
 - *Red strips have daily chores.*
 - *Green strips have weekly chores.*
 - *Blue strips have monthly chores.*
7. *Put chore strips into the “Honey-Do” jar.*
8. *Decide how many chore strips, and what color, each person should draw. These decisions will be determined by family members' ages and abilities.*
5. *Have family members draw from the Honey-Do jar at the beginning of every month.*
6. *Make sure that the more time-consuming and strenuous chores are distributed fairly.*
7. *Make a separate Honey-Do jar filled with easier tasks for very young children like folding towels, pulling weeds, picking up toys.*
8. *For one month, family members perform the chores they drew from the jar. Repeat the drawing each month.*

ACTIVITY

LEARNING TO MAKE RESPONSIBLE DECISIONS

One of the most important skills to teach in the home is how to make decisions. Children learn this best in families when they have many opportunities to make decisions and when parents explain the reasons for their decisions.

Making decisions is a fundamental skill that is important throughout life. Young people who haven't made decisions about who they are and what they want to do in life are the most vulnerable to peer pressure. Inexperienced decision-makers are more likely to rely on others to make their decisions and define their values for them. On the other hand, those who make many decisions as they're growing up are usually more capable of making choices that will result in their happiness and growth.

Decision-making can, and should, be encouraged by parents from a fairly early point in childhood. Young children can't make many decisions alone because they don't have the experience to avoid safety hazards, to always act in their own best interest, or decide within a value system. Parents can, however, let them make "choices within limits." Parents can say, "You can't play in the street, but you can play in the backyard or in the house. Which would you like to do?" Or, "It's almost time for bed. Would you rather get ready for bed now and then read until it's sleep time, or would you like to play a board game and then get ready for bed?"

It's important that when parents offer choices there really is a choice for the child. Avoid saying things like, "Do you want to get ready for dinner?" when you really mean, "Get ready for dinner now." Don't imply that a choice exists when it really doesn't.

The same idea of decisions within limits can be used as children get older. As children grow, they can be given more and more responsibility and greater opportunity to make their own decisions. Of course, the decisions will still be within parental limits. Choices about clothes to wear, when to do homework, or how to spend allowance can be increasingly turned over to school-age children. It is important for parents to be supportive of their children's efforts to make decisions. Doing so will increase a child's confidence in his ability to make good decisions.

At times, children make choices that parents know beforehand will not work. Sometimes, however, letting children experience for themselves the consequences of their decisions will be a

better teacher than parental advice or authority. Helping children consider alternatives that they haven't considered, then standing back while the child decides, is one of the fine arts of parenting.

Suppose we wanted to take a trip. What would be the best way to get there? Choosing a route is a lot like the process we go through when we make a decision. We should consider many possible routes or solutions. Next, we should look at the benefits and costs of each alternative way: time; comfort; cost; scenery; etc. We will then be able to choose the route that will best meet our needs. Similarly, when we make any meaningful decision we should consider several solutions, then make our best choice based on the information we have. There are usually a number of ways we can accomplish things. Making good decisions is the process of identifying the one way that will work best for us.

Finally, after we've given all possible solutions careful thought, and we've made our best decision, we should not look back with regret. Later, if our decision is proven to be the wrong one, we should remember that we made the best decision we could, with the information we had at the time.

The Decision-Making Process

9. *Identify the problem.*
10. *List all possible solutions.*
11. *Think about each alternative--applying your knowledge, values, resources, and the ease or difficulty of the solution.*
1. *Discuss the issue with those who care about your welfare and happiness. For some this will include God.*
2. *Choose the best solution.*

Keep in mind that decision-making doesn't mean that there is one universal "right" choice for most issues. Different people choose different ways to solve problems that can be equally successful.

Activity

We'll each choose one of the problem situations below. After thinking about the five steps of decision-making listed above, make a decision about what you would do in these situations, and tell why you'd solve the problem that way.

Problem 1: *Friday night is the big game with your school's rival school. It is also your cousin's wedding. You want to go to both. What should you do?*

Problem 2: You have \$25. You see the perfect sweater and you want it. Your mother's birthday is next week. You don't have enough money to buy a gift and the sweater. What should you do?

Problem 3: You have been asked to join the track team for spring season. You also want to be in the school play. Both play rehearsal and team practice are after school. What should you do?

Family members are more likely to include one another in their important decisions if they are listened to and feel like their family cares. Criticizing a family member's decision-making efforts weakens relationships and prevents good communication.

As children grow older and mature, they need to take more and more responsibility for their own decisions. In decisions about college, careers, military service, or even marriage, the primary responsibility ultimately belongs to the young person. A parent can become a trusted advisor and facilitator, helping to locate resources and information so the young person can make informed decisions.

In most families, children grow to young adulthood making decisions that are generally in harmony with their parents' beliefs and values. Sometimes children will choose otherwise. It is a challenge for parents to continue to accept, support and love their child despite their differences. However, loving unconditionally will enable a rich relationship to continue throughout adulthood for both parent and child.