
ChangemakerTeens

The World Is Waiting For You...



Parent Changemaker Pathway

Request #6: Responsible

When I am RESPONSIBLE, I will grow to be independent.

Fostering Responsibility

Here are your 2 choices as a parent:

1. Follow your growing children through life, cleaning up after their mistakes.
2. Give them the tools they need to do it themselves.

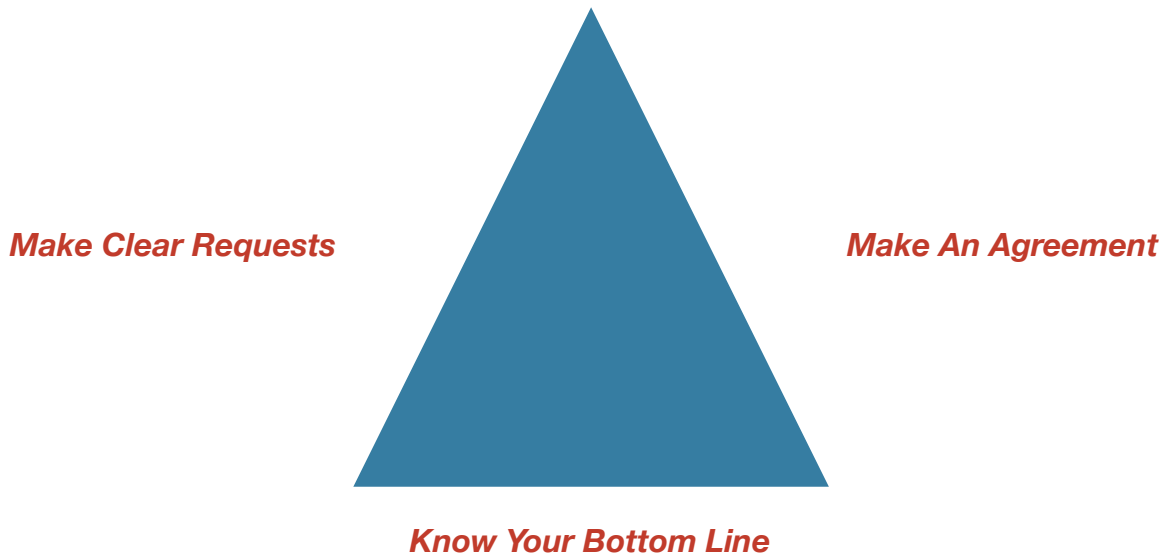
Why do so many parents choose #1? It must be because it's the easiest path. It's less work to clean up the mess themselves than it is to spend the time to get their kids to become self-sufficient and independent. But wait a minute. Isn't that the goal here? Aren't we all expecting our children to be able to manage life on their own eventually? Maybe that's part of the problem in society today.

Here's the good news. When you have listened to your teens with respect and understanding, and shown them support and appreciation, they will be ready, and even obligated, to accept increasing responsibility. The definition of responsibility is to be trustworthy, a virtue that assumes two parties, a giver and a receiver of trust. Now is the time for you teen to become a "giver", rather than the constant "take, take, take" of years past. A word of warning, though. Be prepared for more trial and error in this area than you experienced while exploring the previous nurturing skills!

Promoting responsibility is the act of proposing a challenge to your teen. For example, can you do this? Will you do this? How well will you do this? Now is the time to help them discover their boundaries and potential by both failing AND succeeding at life's challenges. Give your teen a responsibility with clear guidelines, while also giving them a sense of responsibility by valuing their contribution to your household. Define your expectations and clarify exactly what you are asking of them. Start small with household chores and build momentum as their responsibilities increase.

Here's a visual aid to helping your teen increase their level of responsibility.

Accountability Triangle



The left side of the Accountability Triangle says, “Make Clear Requests”. Honestly, if we could all learn to make clear requests in our relationships, we would change the world. There would be no more misunderstandings and miscommunication. But before we can make a clear request, we must recognize the distinction between asking and telling. This may sound obvious, but if you are telling, it’s a statement. If you are asking, it’s a question.

For example: Do this now..... vs. Please can you.....

Too many parents tell their kids to do something and then add the word “OK?” at the end of the request, immediately turning the “tell” into an “ask”. No wonder our kids are confused! Apparently it’s not ok, because they don’t do what we ask. There is a huge difference between “Take out the trash,” and “Take out the trash, ok?” Eliminate the word “ok” from your

vocabulary with your children, whether they are 3 years old or 17. Parents should not be asking their kids for approval!

So, back to the triangle. We make a clear request of our teen on the left side of the triangle. Then it's time to "Make An Agreement" on the right side. But here's the thing. You can only make an agreement with an "ask". There is no room for agreeing to something if you are being told what you must do. Be prepared for one of 3 possible answers when you make agreements with your teens...either yes, no or renegotiate.

For instance, "Will you take out the trash on Monday?" The answer will be either, "yes", "no", or "How about I take it out on Tuesday morning?" Once both parties agree, an agreement has been formed.

Now we've made a clear request and an agreement with our teen. Here's the most critical part. The bottom of the accountability triangle is "Know Your Bottom Line". It is your absolute "must have" bottom line and it must be rock solid. You really need to know what you are expecting of your teen to be able to follow through and hold them accountable.

Example time:

Let's say the trash pickup occurs every Tuesday at 5am. You, the parent, want the garbage at the curb Monday night. This is your absolute bottom line, no negotiation allowed. You have 2 options.

1. Yell and scream and nag Monday night until your teen takes out the trash.
2. Make a clear request, as follows:

Parent: "I request that you be responsible for making sure that the garbage is out at the curb by Monday night at 8pm. How do you feel about that?"

Teen: "I can't do that. I'll forget."

Parent: "How can I support you to remember?"

Teen: "Let's put it on the chore board every Sunday, so I will see it on Monday."

That's it! Now your teen is fully accountable and makes an agreement to take out the trash every Monday night. This allows him the opportunity to feel success (or failure) and also gets him to take ownership of his responsibility. Everybody wins and there is peace in the house on Monday nights.

But what happens if your son breaks the agreement? The best way to handle this is to agree upon the consequences of failure while you are making the agreement. Let your teen help decide what will happen if he does not carry out his responsibility. That way, chances are good that the punishment will fit the crime. You don't need to ground him for a month if he forgets to take out the trash this week, but there needs to be some distinct consequence for failure.

On the other hand, some consequences should be more severe, simply because of the seriousness of the agreement. For example:

Parent: "Call me if you're not able to safely drive home from the party. Do we have an agreement?"

Teen: "Yes, I will call."

Now if he doesn't call you and drives home anyway, he loses the privilege of driving for a month. A pre-agreed upon logical consequence.

There are also natural consequences that take the punishment phase out of your hands entirely. For instance, if you teen fails English, they will end up in summer school. If they drive under the influence, they will lose their license.

Be sure to use the words, "clear request" and "we have an agreement" with your teen to make certain that there is no confusion around what your teen has agreed to do. This sets them up for greater responsibility and success in the future.

Practice Responsibility

Accepting responsibility is a big step for your teen. It's best to start small, and don't tie your teens performance to instant gratification. Let assuming responsibility lead to more long-term benefits: less parent/teen friction over chores, greater freedom to drive or travel, and ultimately being able to treat your teen as an independent young adult.

Start small with household chores, then create momentum by offering bigger and bigger responsibilities. Your teen will be up for the challenge if you don't overwhelm them too quickly.

PRACTICE #1 - AGREEMENTS

Practice designing and making clear requests of your teen and ask for their accountability by making agreements. Make sure you know what your bottom line is and follow through with logical and/or natural consequences. Be clear in your communication and let them know that this is the beginning of a process that will give them more and more responsibility as a young adult.

Say, "I have a request of you. Can we agree on this?" Be prepared to negotiate and know what your bottom line is! Remember, your bottom line is there to say WHAT must be done, not necessarily HOW it will get done.

PRACTICE #2 - BUDGETS

Teens seem to think that money grows on trees, so it's up to you, the parent, to show them otherwise. Create budgets for expenses and then work with your teen to show him where the money comes from and where it goes. This will undoubtedly give her a dose of reality on how small expenses can add up very quickly.

Create a chart of accounts for your income and expenses and ask your teen to take on partial management of the budget. They will eventually get the idea that you are not an endless money supply and they will not be one either!

PRACTICE #3 - SAY IT

Practice saying the word “responsible” when communicating with your teen. Especially when you really are requesting that she be responsible. Be careful that you are not expecting responsible behavior before you actually ask for it.

Instead of: “You can’t use the car on weekends unless you promise to clean it.”

Try this: “Would you like to take on the responsibility of keeping the car clean in exchange for being able to drive it on the weekends?”

Keep going! We’re almost finished!