

## Chapter 10

# Being Responsible

*Robert, a senior came into my class all sweaty and red, with a terrible look of doom in his eyes. He was there to take his final exam for my class.*

*"Mrs. Kolomeisky," he said, "I am going to fail this class, I left my essay at home."*

*It was the last day of school and all materials had to be in that afternoon. Half of Robert's exam was an essay that he was suppose to prepare at home in advance. Without the essay he couldn't pass the exam. Without passing the exam he would be right back in high school again the next year. Or he would have to go to summer school. Robert was an average student. He never turned in any award-winning work, but he did turn it in, most of the time.*

*"Robert, how could you forget? If you don't turn in your essay you won't pass." I asked, trying not to sound hysterical.*

*"Yeah, I know," he mumbled.*

*He sat down, slouched in his seat, hung his head below his shoulders, and looked miserably depressed.*

*"Robert, you drive to school, don't you?" I asked.*

*"Yeah," he said, "but I live twenty minutes away."*

*It was the last class of the year. I had an idea. I called one of our administrators and asked that Robert receive special permission to leave school to get his essay.*

*Permission was granted! I was thrilled. Now this poor child wouldn't have to sit through summer school, I thought. Robert shifted around nervously in his seat when I hung up the phone and told him the good news. Then he slowly left my classroom.*



*He never came back.*

*He had to go to summer school.*

*When I asked him later what had happened he told me a story that, "You just wouldn't believe." It had all of the classic details—his car got a flat tire, he didn't have his key, and when he finally got inside, he couldn't find his essay.*

*He was right, I didn't believe it.*

*Robert ruined his summer over a three-page paper.*

*The paper was on being a responsible citizen.*

## What Does It Mean to be Responsible?



What does responsibility mean to you? There are some other words that might help you out, words that have a lot to do with being responsible. They are: reliable, trustworthy, accountable and answerable. What do you think it means to be responsible?

A responsible person can be trusted to do his work without being nagged and can be relied upon to do what he says he will do. Being responsible means being held accountable or answerable for your actions. This means that if things turn out well, you take credit. If you have made a mistake, you are able to admit it. An irresponsible person will hope that someone else will clean up the mess that they have made instead of doing it themselves. It takes time and maturity to become responsible. Let's see how you rate in this area.

## Self Quiz

*Use the scale below to answer the questions. Write a number value which best describes your usual behavior after each question:*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Never	Sometimes			Usually			Always		

1. Can you be relied upon to fulfill your responsibilities (at home, in school, to your friends, and family)?

2. How helpful are you, overall?
3. Do you complain after you have been asked to do something at home?
4. Do you do your homework without being reminded by your parents?
5. When your parents ask you to do something, do you do it immediately?
6. When you say you will meet someone somewhere, are you on time?
7. Can you keep a secret?
8. Do you occasionally stay home from school and pretend you're sick in order to miss a big test you didn't study for?
9. Do you watch TV when you should be doing other things?
10. Do you ever break your promises?



**Scoring:** Of course this is not a conclusive test. In other words, it only gives you an idea of how responsible (or irresponsible) you are. You probably already had a hunch about where you stood on this scale before taking the test. Let's see how you did:

For questions 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10 and 11, if your total score was:

**100-64** Congratulations! You are unusually responsible. You understand what is important in life, and you will be able to fulfill your goals if you keep it up! The traits you have developed—responsibility, integrity, trustworthiness and a good work ethic—are hard to come by. You know that if you don't give up but learn from your failures you can become stronger. Your example may inspire others who now can only wish to be as responsible as you!

**63-40** Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. You have the makings of a responsible person, but you just haven't been able to develop those important habits that you are after. Keep working on it. You will find the traits you are after are worth a fortune in your life's account!

**39-8** Whoops! You are still struggling with the basics. You have your work cut out for you. Don't fear. Many great people in history have started with very little in the way of personal skills. You

can do it if you are willing to change your habits and set some goals.

Your answers to questions 3, 8, and 9 should speak for themselves!

## Helping Out at Home

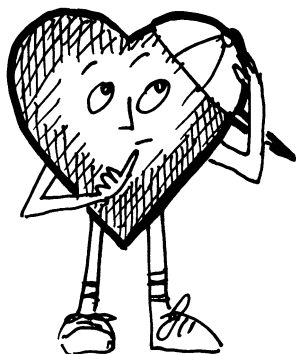
What do you do at home—aside from eat, sleep, and play? Let's see—if you eat, sleep and play, you are probably pretty dependent on your parents. You depend on your parents to feed you. That's normal. You depend on your parents to buy your clothes. That's also pretty normal. You depend on your parents to do your laundry, unless you are one of the few and the proud who do their own laundry. And you depend on your parents to provide you with a bit of spending money. Of course, you might also earn money by doing jobs around the house or babysitting. And that is just the beginning of the list of all of the things that must be done on a daily basis.

## Learning to be Independent

Wow! Did you ever think about it before? What would happen if your parents went out of town for a few weeks? What would you have to do to take care of yourself, and maybe a younger brother or sister? You would have to become very responsible, very quickly. Too responsible, in fact.

You are not an adult quite yet, and we are not here to tell you that you need to behave like one. You are young, and you are still growing and changing. You are quickly becoming a grown-up, but you're not one just yet. However, it is important that you begin to develop some of the qualities necessary to be an independent person—that you realize who you are becoming,

and how you want to live your life. You won't have the pleasure of rolling out of bed on your 18th birthday and walking to the mirror to discover that suddenly, and without reason, you are a full-fledged adult. We know that your body will grow up and mature naturally. Your mind also needs to grow up and mature, which doesn't happen as naturally. There are many grown-ups in adult bodies who never really matured.



Part of learning to be independent comes from taking on more responsibilities at home. In your own home you can learn from your parents, an older brother or sister, or another relative. They can teach you basic survival skills. Once you learn these skills and you don't feel so dependent on the adults, you will be freer.

We interviewed a group of fifth and sixth graders on the topic of helping out at home. Here's what they said:

## Interview

**Question: How do you help you parents at home?**

*I usually help my parents with my little brother, sometimes I do the dishes after we eat, and I do my homework. My older brother Nick does some of these things, but he also helps my mom set the table, walks the dog, and cleans the bathroom. Sometimes we trade jobs when we feel like it.*

*Alex, 6th grade*

*I don't do much of anything. My mom cleans my room, does all of the dishes and takes care of the house. I never really thought about it before, but she does a lot of work. She has a regular job, too.*

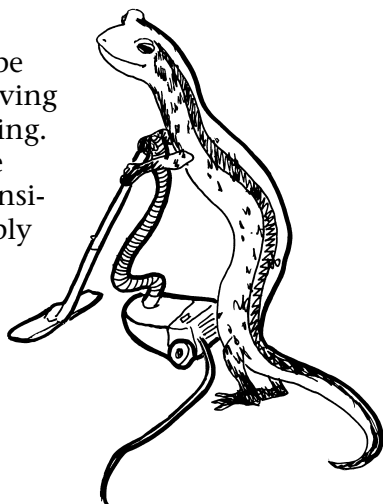
*Sarah, 5th grade*

*I help my dad cook and sometimes help him clean. My mom does the dishes and most of the driving. Out of the three of us my dad does the most, but we split up the housework more now than when I was younger.*

*Tanya, 5th grade*

## Someone's Got to Do It!

Make a list of all of the jobs that must be done in your house, including jobs like driving to field hockey practice and grocery shopping. Close your eyes for a moment and imagine what would happen if none of those responsibilities were met. Your house would probably look like a war zone. Which jobs must be done around your house? Are there any which are not included?



- Take out the trash
- Drive to practice
- Prepare breakfast
- Pay the bills on time
- Pack lunches
- Be on time for work every day
- Cook dinner
- Make the beds
- Cleaning (including the bathroom!)
- Do the laundry
- Walk the dog
- Mow the lawn
- Clean the cat's box
- Do yard work
- Feed the animals
- Grocery shopping
- Make dental and doctor appointments
- Other...

## Finding Freedom

As a child you learned small responsibilities, like changing into your pajamas by yourself or brushing your teeth without your mom's help. As you got older you became more and more independent. Maybe you went from brushing your teeth to walking to the library to check out a book for a school report. You were no longer totally dependent on your parents for everything.

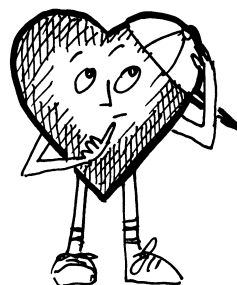
Little by little your responsibilities grow. It's natural. When you are 30 years old, you don't want your mom to wash your dirty laundry or to pick up your toys. But to become responsible for the big stuff, you have to start with small items first. It's like building your muscles. You won't be able to lift heavy weights without training, and training properly may take you months, even years. After training, though, you are prepared to lift heavy weights because you are in good condition, and you have had lots of practice with the smaller weights.

As you grow up, you are given more freedom. You have the freedom to make greater decisions. Along with this freedom comes responsibility for the results of your choices. So, being ready to help around the house and take charge of doing your homework at night (without having your mom or dad nag you) is a start. With each new task you take on, you will grow in responsibility. In time you will be ready to take on bigger and more exciting responsibilities—like making life-changing choices and decisions.

## Responsibility and Success

Making decisions and being able to accomplish goals go together. Like most of us you probably want to make your own decisions. Each year you are able to make more important decisions. When you can show your parents that you can make decisions responsibly, they are more likely to trust you with bigger decisions. To be independent and to achieve your goals and dreams, you have to take responsibility for your own choices.

Imagine that you are hanging on the end of a rope off the edge of a mountain. Think of the top of the rope as your goal. Once you get to the top you have reached your dream. Think of your muscles as your ability to stick to your decisions and act responsibly. You need the rope, but you also need your muscles to pull you up to where you want to go. The best rope in the world won't help you out if you just hang onto the end. By the way, when you are having a rough time, it's okay to just hang on the end for a while. When you are ready to take responsibility, up you go.



### Help Wanted

**Wanted:** A Responsible Young Person to Help Me With My Business

**Hourly Pay:** Great

Attention young men and women: I need the help of one responsible, young, enthusiastic person, male or female. I need someone who is hard-working, trustworthy, reliable, accountable, undeniably sharp and energetic to help me with my business. Does this sound like you? Apply immediately, in person, to Mr. Right, no loafers or gossips need apply. Serious inquiries only!!

## Something to Think About

**Mother:** *I've had it with Julie. She is almost 13 years old and she always complains when I ask her to help me. She never wants to do what is needed around the house. It is driving me crazy. When she wants to be helpful, like when her friends are over, she is perfectly capable. She cooks a little, cleans up, and even makes the house look beautiful. But if she is not interested I can just forget about getting her help.*

What advice would you give to Julie's mother? Do you think Julie could be more responsible at home? What do you do in your house to help your parents? Do you think you should do more? Do you think you should do less? Is there one person in your home who does most of the work? If so, do you think that is fair?



## Journal

Define the word 'responsible' using your own definition, and your own ideas about what it means to be responsible.



## To Do

1. As a class, set up a mock interview with Mr. Right. What does Mr. Right want? Do you think that you could fill the position? If so, what evidence can you give that you have proven yourself to be responsible in the past?
2. There is a saying that what goes around comes around. Do you think that if you are helpful in your house now that in the future when you need help you will receive that help? Do you agree that what goes around comes around?
3. In pairs, take turns asking each other questions about your responsibilities at home. When you answer the questions, pretend that you are either your mom or your dad answering about you:
  - What does (your name) do in the house to help?
  - What do you ask him to do?
  - Are there any things that he doesn't do now that you wish he'd do?
  - When you ask for his help does he help you willingly, or does he become angry?



- *On a scale from 1-10, how helpful would you say he is (10 being the most helpful)?*
4. Go back to number three and do the interview with your parents at home. See how your interview answers measure up against your parents!

## Key Points

- 🕒 You can only be independent if you are also responsible.
- 🕒 The more responsible you are, the greater freedom you have.



**Everyone thinks of changing the world,  
but no one thinks of changing himself.**

**Leo Tolstoy**

