

## Why Can't She Just Take Out the Trash?!? (and other responsibility dilemmas)

**How many times have you thought; “How could she have lost her homework?” – “Why didn't he clean his room?” - “What's going on here? - How can I make them more responsible???”**

The truth is you can't **make** your children be responsible. Responsibility, like all the positive values we want our children to have, is an internal asset. Children have to develop internal assets from the inside out. Helping your child become more responsible is not something you can do *to* or *for* your child, but it is something you can do *with* your child. Children have to do the work of becoming responsible, but you can ensure that they are “becoming” by providing a safe, nurturing supportive environment that encourages the development of the all the positive skills and values they need. Here are a few ideas to think about.

### **Learning to be responsible at home and school**

Children who feel they have an important and useful role to play in their families are more apt to act responsibly. It is this sense of interdependence and caring that encourages responsibility in children.

- Include your children in the normal every day problem solving that happens when several people are trying to share a room or a living space or the TV or the phone etc. etc.
- Instead of arbitrarily assigning chores, sit down regularly with your whole family and talk about what needs to be done and how you, as a family, can get everything done.
- Be realistic about your expectations. A six year old can certainly do some dusting, but probably not as well as you. Remember, it's a sense of responsibility you're trying to nurture not perfect housekeeping skills.
- Young children are usually eager to help. Always encourage this by accepting their help, even when it would be far easier to do it yourself.
- A child's homework is her/his responsibility. Make sure your child knows that you feel very confident in his/her ability to handle this responsibility and then **let him/her do it!**

The same ideas apply at school. A child who feels valued as an important member of the classroom community will feel more responsible for his/her behavior. It's the same sense of belonging and caring about the group that encourages the development of responsible behavior at home and at school.

### **Learning to think for themselves**

Children have to learn to think for themselves, make decisions and then live with the consequences of those decisions if they are to become responsible people. It's in going through this process over and over that children can become more responsible.

*The Assets Approach is a researched-based plan that is guiding our whole community in making sure **ALL** our children have what they need to become healthy, caring, responsible adults. After decades of research, the Search Institute ([www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)) has named 40 positive experiences, opportunities, relationship, attitudes, skills and values that have a powerful, positive impact on young people. Research shows that these 40 “assets” help children and teens make smart choices and grow-up with the skills they need to be strong, caring resilient adults. Together, the 40 assets provide a strong foundation on which children can build their lives.*

For more information about the practical “real-life” application of the Assets Framework, please contact: Mary Ann Moran, Assets Liaison at [mmoran@co.arlington.va.us](mailto:mmoran@co.arlington.va.us) or (703) 228-1671.