FLY FiVE®

The Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum

RESPONSIBILITY

Instilling Responsibility in Students

What does setting a reminder on your phone to complete a task, offering an apology for harm done, and attending a town council meeting have in common? While these may seem like three disparate actions, they are all facets of the competency of responsibility. Responsibility is a multifaceted set of skills requiring us to be accountable for ourselves as well as the world in which we live. Being responsible ensures that we can trust ourselves, and that we can be trusted by others, to consistently behave in a positive, constructive way.

The need for responsibility, both personal and social, has been particularly potent over the last year. Between the new social norms intended to keep our communities safe and the responsibility we all have for creating a racially just and equitable society, there's no question that responsibility is of utmost importance. Not only for ourselves and our own success and satisfaction, but for the success and health of our schools, community, and even our country.

How, then, do we instill responsibility in our students? Because responsibility is a set of teachable skills, we can take concrete steps to raise responsible students. By clearly defining what responsibility is, highlighting its importance, and offering students consistent opportunities to practice their skills, we can provide them the essential tools to develop competence in responsibility.
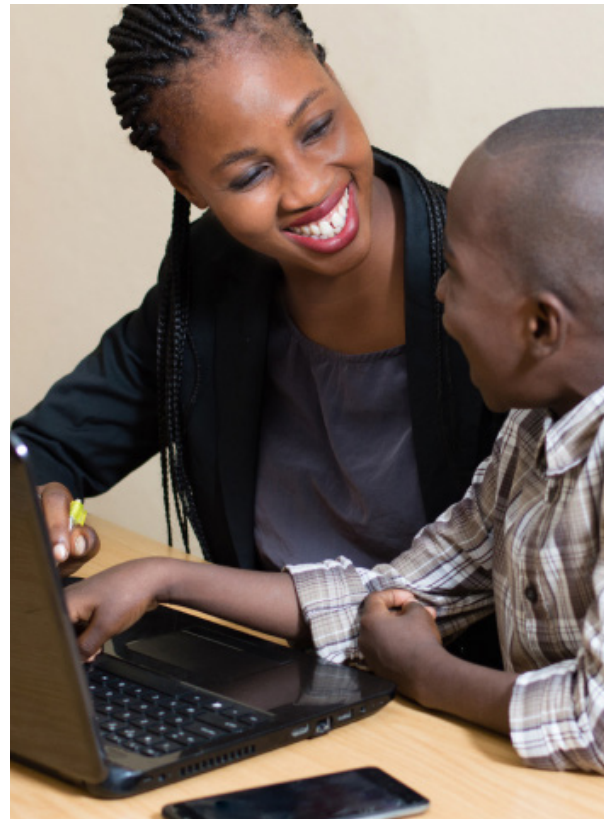
What Is Responsibility?

Responsibility is crucial for civil society. Having evolved as a behavioral construct from the way that social and political power was exercised in the name of religion, responsibility encompasses both individual and collective behaviors (Maier, 2018). As governments came to be responsible for their citizens, individuals came to be responsible for themselves and their fellow citizens.

Thus, responsibility evolved into two domains: individual responsibility and collective responsibility. Individual responsibility refers to one's accountability for their actions and is related to their autonomy within society; collective responsibility refers to one's accountability to their fellow citizens and how they uphold the social order (Maier, 2018). Social responsibility refers to civic engagement, such as participating in positive community-building and understanding one's role in the upkeep of one's environment. Personal responsibility refers to the act of holding oneself accountable and practicing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive control (Mergler & Shield, 2016).

As a socially desirable and beneficial competency, responsibility should occupy a prominent position in student learning. Fly Five defines responsibility as: "the ability to motivate oneself to act and follow through on expectations; to define a problem, consider the consequences, and choose a positive solution." The standards are:

01 Selects the best option among the choices for a suitable outcome

02 Holds oneself accountable

03 Demonstrates social, civic, and digital responsibility

04 Takes care of property

These standards outline learning goals for students. As they develop the skills to meet each of these standards, they will be on their way toward becoming responsible, engaged members of their classroom and community.

The Impact of Showing Responsibility

Cultivating responsibility in students has a big impact on their social, emotional, and academic outcomes. Responsible children can develop a take-charge attitude and learn to depend on themselves (Pendergrass, 1982), which builds their confidence and boosts positive interpersonal relationships. When students demonstrate responsible behaviors, the classroom is likely to be more conducive to learning and development (Wentzel, 1991).

Teachers with responsible students can spend less time on interruptions and more time on lessons, and student academic performance improves. Additionally, responsible tendencies are a predictor of positive social behavior later in life, such as volunteering or voting, and these behaviors can be modeled and taught with sustained guidance over a period of time (Wray Lake et al., 2016; Lenzi et al., 2014).

Strategies for Developing Responsibility

When we foster students' responsibility skills, students develop into reliable and independent individuals who care about making the right choices. Responsible students not only consider how their actions affect others, they seek to make choices that positively impact their relationships and community (Altalib et al., 2013). As we strive to foster civically engaged, accountable students and citizens, developing responsibility is a crucial aspect of achieving this goal.

Try employing the following strategies with your students:

Provide students choices for learning. Student motivation relates to whether or not they are able to make choices related to their learning. Allow students to choose topics that interest them so they can explore their natural curiosity. When students have a stake in what and how they learn, they feel more responsible for their success (McCombs, 2010). Consider using lessons and activities characterized by engaging academics: active, interactive, appropriately challenging, purposeful, strength- and interest-driven, and autonomous. Engaging academics allows students to take control of their learning and explore their lessons in a way that is unique to them.

Show students how to be responsible. Students need a stake in their learning to generate an innate sense of responsibility and ownership surrounding their learning. Help students develop project management skills by allowing them to choose from a range of due dates and map out how they will complete their work by that time (Lexia, 2020). Offer them strategies such as real or virtual calendars to manage their time. Highlight the value of setting alerts for deadlines and sticking to their work schedule.

Practice perspective taking and apologizing. Responsible children understand the importance of their words and actions and they can comprehend how their behaviors impact others (Altalib et al., 2013). When reading books or watching TV, start a discussion about the thoughts and feelings of one of the characters. This encourages them to consider alternative perspectives, which helps build personal and social responsibility. It's also important to teach students how to show accountability for their actions through a proper apology. The three steps for a proper apology are:

- Express remorse for harm done, even if it was unintentional

- Admit responsibility for harm done and express understanding about the situation

- Offer reparations to make it right

Create a culture of responsibility. We acquire responsible tendencies by internalizing external norms (Carbonero et al., 2017). This means that educators should strive to set the conditions for responsibility to grow. Assign groups of students weekly, rotating tasks in the classroom so they learn to be responsible for the upkeep of their space. When students demonstrate responsibility, or even when they fail to demonstrate responsibility, use the opportunity to discuss why responsible behaviors are important. Why do we put our things away when we're done? Why do we show up on time for class? This helps weave responsibility into the fabric of the classroom and helps students connect responsibility to their well-being.

Responsibility speaks for itself in many ways: responsible students can mean fewer classroom disruptions, and less disruption means deeper learning and stronger teacher-student relationships. But more than that, we want to create an environment where being responsible is not just "cool," but urgent and necessary. When students are explicitly taught how to be responsible, they can make positive, safe, and informed choices about what they want their world to look like and how to go about achieving that vision.

References

Altalib, A., Abusulayman, A., & Altalib, O. (2013). *Parent-child relations: A guide to raising children*. The International Institute of Islamic Thought. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvktrvqn

Carbonero, M. A., Martín-Antón, L. J., Otero, L., & Monsalvo, E. (2017). Program to promote personal and social responsibility in the secondary classroom. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8(809). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00809

Denton, P. (2005, April 1). *Academic choice*. Responsive Classroom. https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/academic-choice/

Lenzi, M., Vieno, A., Santaninello, M., Nation, M., & Voight, A. (2014). The role played by the family in shaping early and middle adolescent civic responsibility. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 34(2), 251–278. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0272431613485822

Lewis, R. R., Montuoro, P., & McCann, P. (2013). Self-predicted classroom behavior without external controls: Imagining a 'Lord of the Flies' scenario." *Australian Journal of Education*, 57(3),270. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0004944113496175

Lexia. (2020). *How to create a classroom culture of responsibility*. https://www.lexialearning.com/blog/how-to-create-a-classroom-culture-of-responsibility.

Maier, R. (2018). Self-responsibility: Transformations. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 63(1), 27–42. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0002764218816802

McCombs, B. (2010). *Developing responsible and autonomous learners: A key to motivating students.* American Psychological Association. https://www.apa.org/education/k12/learners

Mergler, A. & Shield, P. (2016). Development of the personal responsibility scale for adolescents." *Journal of Adolescence*, 51, 50–7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.05.011

Pendergrass, R. A. (1982). A thinking approach to teaching responsibility." *The Clearing House*, 56(2), 90–92. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30186162

Wentzel, K. R. (1991). Social competence at school: Relation between social responsibility and academic achievement. *Review of Educational Research*, 61(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.3102%2F00346543061001001

Wray-Lake, L., Syvertsen, A. K., & Flanagan, C. A. (2016). Developmental change in social responsibility during adolescence: An ecological perspective. *Developmental Psychology*, 52(1), 130–142. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.05.011