**Are You Teaching Kids Responsibility?**

**50 Simple Challenges to Get You Started by**[**Cara Sue Achterberg**](https://afineparent.com/author/cara-sue-achterberg).

**How capable are your kids?**

I’m not talking about their math ability or how well they throw a baseball.

Can they operate a vacuum cleaner? Cook a meal? Lodge a complaint? Change a light bulb?

Many kids today live a life of entitlement. Very little is asked of them in terms of responsibilities at home.

I know, at least in my house, this is mainly due to parental laziness. [It’s much easier to do a job myself](https://afineparent.com/productivity/productivity-tips.html), especially if I want it done right (interpretation – the way I think it should be done).

I get [tired of nagging](https://afineparent.com/be-positive/positive-reinforcement.html), demanding, and threatening. Consequently, instead of teaching kids responsibility, I accept half-hearted efforts because, well, at least they did something.

My kids have very few responsibilities in the real scheme of things, yet they claim that kids at other houses aren’t enslaved as they are in our home. Hmmm…

**Raising a Generation of Entitled Kids**

In her book, [Cleaning House: A Mom’s Twelve-Month Experiment to Rid Her Home of Youth Entitlement](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0307730670/ref%3Das_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0307730670&linkCode=as2&tag=persfinaforst-20&linkId=TYKYWYUJ3H3DOHCH), Kay Wills Wyma cites the frequency of young adults who quit jobs because they don’t like them and throw away educations because they’ve changed their minds.

Most 22-29 year olds rely on money from their parents to fund major expenses. They move home and freeload expecting their parents to take care of them. They don’t feel responsible for paying the bills, especially if it means taking a job that is hard and doesn’t pay well.

Wyma asks — Why should they? Isn’t the world here to serve them? Aren’t they entitled to a strife-free happy life?

She makes a point. I know my own kids are indignant when I ask them to do a chore not on their assigned list.

But Wyma takes the argument another step.

She says that when we do the work and problem solve for our kids, essentially we’re saying they aren’t capable of doing it themselves.

When their rooms get beyond messy, we barge in and clean-up for them, sending the message that they can’t do it themselves.

When we do all the laundry, housework, and cooking, we continue to assert that they’re not capable of doing their part.

We treat them like long-term guests in our homes.

When they spill something and shed tears of frustration or embarrassment, we rush in to rescue, teaching them that they aren’t responsible for cleaning up their own messes.

And when a homework project overwhelms and they’re exhausted after practice, we offer our assistance, instead of [allowing them to learn that sometimes life is hard and you have to deal with it](http://themattwalshblog.com/2013/11/19/radical-parenting-technique-holding-your-kids-responsible-for-their-behavior/).

**Turning the Ship Around**

We can [begin raising responsible, capable adults](http://www.jolynneshane.com/raising-responsible-kids-a-series.html) much sooner than you’d think.

There’s no need to wait until they can argue with us to get the ball rolling. Giving kids responsibility for their actions, their belongings, and their home helps combat the prolific creep of entitlement so evident in much of today’s society.

Television shows marketed towards kids are full of examples of rich, beautiful, clever children. They don’t do dishes. They don’t pack their own lunch. Heck, many of these tv personalities have hired help for those tasks.

In her online paper, “[Practice What You Preach: Raising Responsible Versus Entitled Children](http://www.dunwoodypsychologists.com/Articles/raising_responsible_versus_entitled_children.htm)“, Marsha B Sauls, PhD, speaks of parenting for responsibility as the flip side of parenting for entitlement.

When we hold our children accountable for their actions, even if it means an uncomfortable, even painful, interaction with them, we are raising responsible children.

I know firsthand, how difficult this can be especially with a strong-willed (and confidently vocal) daughter! It’s a lesson I seem to need to learn repeatedly.

It began with our [first emotional tug of war](https://afineparent.com/stop-yelling-at-kids/preventing-power-struggles-with-kids.html) when I asked her at age five to tidy up her room and continues today at fifteen.

[My heart broke](https://afineparent.com/building-character/mean-kids.html) the first time she yelled – “You are so mean! I hate you!” in response to my request that she hang up her towel.

It would be much easier to avoid these battles, and I admit there are days when I take a pass, but I love my kids enough to continue the effort knowing the world needs more responsible people and fewer entitled ones.

So how do we raise responsible rather than entitled children?

It takes an intentional effort on our part as parents.

Here are 50 simple challenges you can use to begin teaching kids responsibility at any age.

**Age Appropriate Chores/Tasks for Toddlers**

1. Turn off lights when he/she leaves her room (this may require that a step stool be temporarily put in place).
2. Hang up towel after a bath. (Use a hook rather than a bar to make this easier.)
3. Put toys away when finished. (Provide plenty of bins and easy to access storage.)
4. Say thank you to teachers, doctors, babysitters, waiters, even the mailman every time you encounter them.
5. Carry dishes to counter after eating. (Take it one step further and have your child put his/her utensils in the dishwasher.)
6. When a spill occurs, instead of swooping in, hand your child a towel and help him wipe up his/her own mess.

**Age Appropriate Chores/Tasks for Preschoolers**

1. Set the table.
2. Wipe out sink after brushing teeth.
3. Turn off all the lights in house when family is leaving the house.
4. Feed a pet.
5. Tidy up his/her room.
6. Dust a room.
7. Open and hold the door for others.

**Age Appropriate Chores/Tasks for Kids Age 6-11**

1. Wash windows and mirrors (use vinegar diluted in water for safety).
2. Carry clothing to laundry room and sort. Put away clothing after it is clean.
3. Answer the phone politely and take a message.
4. Load dishwasher.
5. Walk the dog and/or clean out the litter box.
6. Vacuum a room.
7. Organize his/her closet.
8. Help make dinner (older kids can graduate to doing this on their own).
9. Pack own lunch and make own breakfast
10. Accompany parent into the voting booth to observe the process.
11. Help purchase/create thank you gifts for teachers, babysitter, etc.
12. Do something nice for someone who is experiencing sickness or loss.
13. Clean out the back seat of car.
14. [Be responsible for homework](https://afineparent.com/be-positive/not-doing-homework.html).
15. Use phone to call grandparents, friends, etc.
16. Order for herself/himself at restaurants.
17. Have own library card and be responsible for late fees.
18. When a need arises while shopping, ask an employee for help.

**Age Appropriate Chores/Tasks for Kids Ages 12+**

1. Devise a schedule and test smoke detectors four times a year
2. Organize a thank you gift for a coach, teacher, etc.
3. Paint bedroom and rearrange furniture.
4. Plant own garden. (Even if it’s only a pot or window box!)
5. Create invitations/plan a party.
6. Plan and [make dinner once a month](https://afineparent.com/healthy-families/healthy-family-meals.html) (or once a week!).
7. Choose a charity and designate a portion of allowance to that charity.
8. Mop a floor.
9. When unhappy with a product or service, register a complaint.
10. Create a “Day in the Life” video of your family. (Makes a great holiday gift!)
11. Sew on a button.
12. Write a real letter to a relative or elected official.
13. Figure out the correct tip when eating out.
14. Create a budget for holiday shopping.
15. Wash the car and fill the tank with gas.
16. Order a home-delivered meal and pay (and tip) the delivery person.
17. Volunteer at a soup kitchen or food bank.
18. Clean the toilet each week.
19. When light bulb burns out, replace.

A few years ago, we listened eagerly as a teacher with a reputation for being the toughest teacher in the middle school explained her philosophy. We had heard kids came away from her class better students more than prepared for high school.

“I set the bar very high,” she said. “It may even seem too high, but over the years I’ve found that we underestimate our kids. Wherever I set the bar – kids will reach for it and most will make it. If I set the bar at a reasonable height – they will meet that, too, but then we’ll never know what they were really capable of doing.”

Some of these challenges may seem like too much for your children. Challenge them to master these tasks, anyway.

I am quite certain they will surprise you and maybe even themselves.