**Teach kids to end the blame game and be accountable**

**Source: Akhila Das Blah, Content Writer & Storyteller**

A few days ago, the boys were kicking a ball around in the common area outside our house. Unfortunately, in their natural exuberance of emulating Ronaldo and Messi, our neighbour’s ceramic flower pot was knocked over and broken. Immediately, there were shouts of “This is your fault. No, it’s not. It was an accident.” I called them over and insisted amid many protests that they ring the neighbour’s doorbell, apologise for the damage caused and offer to replace the pot with their pocket money. I stood at a distance and watched them go over and apologise to our elderly neighbour. She was justifiably annoyed at having her flowerpot broken and proceeded to express her displeasure to the boys. As a parent, I felt bad as I could see their shoulders droop and their heads bowed as they listened to her strictures. It wasn’t easy for them to stand there and get admonished. But, I was also proud of them for having acknowledged their actions and taken responsibility for it. As parents, our natural instinct is to protect our children from pain and hurt. We want to immediately leap in and fix their problems. If our child is having problems in school, we instantly call the teacher as we all have our child’s class teacher’s numbers on speed dial. If our child is having an issue in his peer group, we speak with the parent of the child concerned and demand that they speak to their child and fix the problem. We no longer give our children an opportunity to solve their own problems or take responsibility for their own actions. With all best intentions, we end up raising children who are not equipped to contribute responsibly to society. They become grownups who constantly make excuses, shift blame and find ways to justify their behaviour without owning up to it. In other words, they become politicians. Jokes aside, how can we teach our child to take responsibility for his own actions?

Children need to be encouraged to clean up their own messes. Make it a normal part of your daily life. Even a toddler who spills milk on the floor can be empowered to mop it up with a cloth. Children want to help and they just need an opportunity to do so.

**Be aware of your reaction**

If your child accidentally makes a mess, don’t react angrily. Respond calmly. “Oops, that’s quite a mess you’ve created. Come on; let’s see what we can do to clean it up.” Encourage their participation in the cleanup effort even though it may take longer and may not be as efficient as you would like it to be.

**End the blame game**

As they get older, they may make excuses or try to shift the blame. “It wasn’t my fault.””The teacher wasn’t clear in her instructions.””He started it.” It’s human to make excuses or try to shift the blame. But, blaming absolves you of responsibility and makes the other person defensive. When we look to blame someone, we aren’t encouraging healthy communication or acceptance of our role in the situation. When your child starts to blame someone, encourage him to think of what he could do differently next time. “I was wrong to hit him. Next time, I can walk away if he is annoying me.”

**Learn to solve problems**

Nobody wants to be in trouble. It’s natural to have a fear of consequences. “The teacher will shout at me if I tell her I didn’t do my homework.” In their interaction with others, they may not be able to control how the other person will react. But, they do have control over their actions. Teach them that we all make mistakes. It’s what we do after we’ve made the mistake that counts. It’s important that they learn that they may not be able to undo their mistake but they can help repair it. Ask them what they can do to solve the problem.

**Create a safe zone**

Sometimes, children don’t accept fault because of the shame they feel. They are scared that they will be judged or that they will not be loved. Create a safe zone for your child. Ensure that they know that they will be loved irrespective of their actions. Nothing can change the way you feel about them. Set clear expectations for behaviour so children know exactly what they need to do and what behaviour you expect from them. Decide as a family what is permissible and what isn’t.

**Be consistent**

When setting rules, ensure that you follow through and there are consequences for not following the rules. If name calling isn’t allowed and you lose screen privileges as a result, ensure that it applies all the time. If you bend the rules or forget to implement them, children will believe that they can get away without taking responsibility for their actions. Make sure that you hold them accountable for their actions, every time. They need to see that their actions have consequences.

**Model accountability and responsibility**

Own up to your faults and show them how you work to repair the damage caused by your mistakes. Taking responsibility for our actions is hard, even for an adult. By starting early and ensuring that you create a safe space for your child to accept the consequences of his actions, you will be helping him grow into a mature, responsible adult who makes a positive impact on society.