



SIX LESSONS CHILDREN NEED TO LEARN

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INTRODUCTION

Six Lessons Children Need to Learn

How would you like your child to be known as an adult?

- Controlled
- Humble
- Resilient
- Responsible
- Mature
- Honest

Children will not develop these traits on their own. They need your guidance.

This magazine will discuss six essential lessons that you can teach your children—lessons that will prepare them for adulthood.



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LESSON 1

THE BENEFITS OF SELF-CONTROL

WHAT IS SELF-CONTROL?

Self-control includes the ability to

- delay gratification
- restrain impulses
- complete unpleasant tasks
- put others before self

WHY IS SELF-CONTROL IMPORTANT?

Children who have greater self-control can resist temptation, even if the temptation promises short-term rewards. In contrast, children with less self-control may be more likely to

- be aggressive
- suffer depression
- smoke or abuse alcohol or drugs
- make poor choices in what they eat

One study found that children with greater self-control were less likely, as adults, to have health issues, financial stress, and problems with the law. That study led Professor Angela Duckworth of the University of Pennsylvania to conclude: “There may be no such thing as ‘too much’ self-control.”

HOW TO TEACH SELF-CONTROL

Learn to say no and mean it.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Let your word ‘Yes’ mean yes, your ‘No,’ no.”—Matthew 5:37.

Young children might test a parent’s resolve by throwing a tantrum—perhaps even in public. If the parent gives in, the child learns that tantrums are an effective way to get a no changed to a yes.



TRAIN NOW

Saying no to your child now will help him to say no to himself later in life—for example, if he is tempted to take drugs or to engage in other harmful practices

On the other hand, if the parent says no and means it, the child learns a basic fact of life—that *we cannot always get what we want*. “Ironically, people who learn that lesson seem to be the most fulfilled,” writes Dr. David Walsh. “We’re not doing our kids any favors when we teach them that the world will always serve up whatever they want on a silver platter.”*

Saying no to your child now will help him to say no to himself later in life—for example, if he is tempted to take drugs, have premarital sex, or engage in other harmful practices.

* From the book *No: Why Kids—of All Ages—Need to Hear It and Ways Parents Can Say It*.

Help your children to understand consequences, both good and bad.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Whatever a person is sowing, this he will also reap.”—Galatians 6:7.

Your child needs to understand that actions have consequences and that a lack of self-control will therefore have undesirable results. For example, if your son typically loses his temper when he gets upset, others may tend to avoid him. On the other hand, if he develops the ability to restrain himself when provoked—or to wait patiently rather than interrupt—people will be drawn to him. Help your child understand that he is more likely to have good outcomes when he practices self-restraint.

Teach your child to prioritize.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Make sure of the more important things.”—Philippians 1:10.

Self-control is not just a matter of holding back from doing wrong; it includes doing what is necessary, even when this is not particularly exciting or fun. It is important for your child to learn how to establish priorities and stick to them. Have your child do the important things first. For example, he should put homework before recreation.

Be a good role model.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “I set the pattern for you, that just as I did to you, you should also do.”—John 13:15.

Your child will see how you respond to unpleasant or frustrating situations. Demonstrate by your example that self-control leads to better outcomes. For example, when your child tests your patience, do you react with anger or do you remain calm?

Teach by Example

- Does my child see me work through frustrating situations without losing my temper?
- Have I explained to my child the reasons why I try to handle problems calmly?
- How would my child describe me—as impulsive and quick-tempered or as self-disciplined and controlled?

What We Did . . .

“Even though our daughter was allowed to become frustrated or angry, she wasn’t allowed to let those feelings exasperate those around her. If she couldn’t control herself, then she would be removed from others’ company until she could calm down.”—**Theresa.**

“My wife and I made it our aim to let our children know when they made us proud. We praised them when they didn’t allow difficulty to get them out of sorts or when they kept their cool and showed self-control.”
—**Wayne.**

LESSON 2

HOW TO BE HUMBLE

WHAT IS HUMILITY?

Humble people are respectful. They do not behave arrogantly, nor do they expect others to treat them as special. Rather, a person with humility takes genuine interest in others and is willing to learn from them.

Sometimes humility is misjudged as a weakness. In reality, it is a strength that helps people recognize their faults and acknowledge their limitations.

WHY IS HUMILITY IMPORTANT?

- **Humility benefits relationships.** “Overall, humble people are more connected to others,” says the book *The Narcissism Epidemic*. It adds that such people find it “easier to relate to other people and the wider world.”
- **Humility benefits your child’s future.** Learning to be humble will help your child both now and later in life—for example, when seeking employment. “The young person with bloated self-esteem, unaware of her own deficiencies, is unlikely to do well in the job interview,” writes Dr. Leonard Sax. “But the young person who is genuinely interested in what the recruiter has to say is more likely to get the job.”*

HOW TO TEACH HUMILITY

Encourage a balanced view of self.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he is deceiving himself.”—Galatians 6:3.

- **Avoid misleading maxims.** Sayings like “All your dreams can come true” and “You can be

* From the book *The Collapse of Parenting*.



TRAIN NOW

A child who learns to perform humble tasks at home is more likely to work well with others as an adult

anything that you want to be” might *sound* inspiring, but they often do not prove true in real life. Your children will likely be more successful if they have reasonable goals and work hard to achieve them.

- **Praise specific actions.** Simply telling a child that he or she is “awesome” does not encourage humility. Be specific.
- **Limit your child’s use of social media.** Often, social media is linked with self-promotion—broadcasting a person’s talents and accomplishments—the very opposite of humility.
- **Encourage your child to apologize quickly.** Help your child to see where he is wrong and to acknowledge it.

Promote gratitude.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Show yourselves thankful.”
—Colossians 3:15.

- **Gratitude for creation.** Children should appreciate nature and how much we depend on it for survival. We need air to breathe, water to drink, and food to eat. Use these examples to instill appreciation, awe, and gratitude for the wonders of the natural world.
- **Gratitude for people.** Remind your child that everyone is superior to him in one way or another and that instead of being jealous of others’ skills and abilities, he can learn from them.
- **Expressing gratitude.** Teach your children to say “thank you,” not just with words but with genuine appreciation. A grateful spirit has been called a building block of humility.

Teach your children that there is value in serving others.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “With humility consider others superior to you, as you look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others.”—Philippians 2:3, 4.

- **Expect your child to do chores.** Exempting your child from family chores might give him the message, ‘You are too important to do this!’ Family duties should come first, and playing second. Point out how chores benefit others and how others will appreciate and respect him for doing them.
- **Emphasize that serving others is a privilege.** Doing so is a primary way to develop maturity. Therefore, encourage your child to identify those in need. Discuss with him what he can do to help them. Commend and support your child as he serves others.

Teach by Example

- Do I let my children know that at times I also need help from others?
- Do I speak positively and appreciatively about others, or do I belittle them?
- Do my children see that I value serving others?

What We Did . . .

“Our daughter told us about a classmate who, she said, is mean to others and is not liked. I told her to think of what that girl might be going through at home. After all, not everybody has a good family life. That helped our daughter to see that she is not better than others. She may just have better circumstances.”—Karen.

“We encourage our daughters to enjoy what they learn in school and simply to do their best without comparing themselves to others. We want them to know that we will not compare them to others either.”—Marianna.

LESSON 3

HOW TO BE RESILIENT

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

A resilient person bounces back from obstacles and disappointments. This skill is acquired through experience. Just as a child cannot learn how to walk without an occasional fall, he cannot learn how to succeed in life without experiencing occasional setbacks.

WHY IS RESILIENCE IMPORTANT?

Some children get discouraged when they meet with failure, adversity, or criticism. Others give up entirely. However, they need to understand the following facts:

- Failure is inevitable in some endeavors.
—James 3:2.
- Adversity affects everyone at some point.
—Ecclesiastes 9:11.
- Correction is vital for learning.
—Proverbs 9:9.

Resilience will help your child face life's challenges with confidence.

HOW TO TEACH RESILIENCE

When your child fails.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “The righteous one may fall seven times, and he will get up again.”
—Proverbs 24:16.

Help your child put things in perspective. For example, what would he do if he failed a test at school? He might give up, saying, “I can’t do anything right!”

To teach resilience, help your child work out a strategy that will help him to improve. In this way, he will take charge of the problem rather than become a victim of it.



TRAIN NOW

A child who is able to bounce back from disappointments and mistakes is more likely to persevere when learning skills and to become proficient at them

At the same time, avoid fixing the problem for your child. Instead, help him create his own plan. You might ask him, “What can you do to improve your understanding of the subject that is being taught?”

When adversity strikes.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “You do not know what your life will be like tomorrow.”—James 4:14.

Life is unpredictable. A person who is rich today might be poor tomorrow; a person who is healthy today might be sick tomorrow. “The swift do not always win the race, nor do the mighty win the

battle,” says the Bible, “because time and unexpected events overtake them all.”—Ecclesiastes 9:11.

As a parent, you rightly take reasonable steps to protect your child from danger. Realistically, though, it is not possible to shield your child from all of life’s adversities.

Of course, your child may not be old enough to experience the loss of a job or a financial reversal. Still, you can help him cope with other adversities—for example, the loss of a friendship or the death of a family member.*

When your child receives constructive criticism.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Listen to counsel . . . in order to become wise in your future.”—Proverbs 19:20.

Constructive criticism is not bullying; it is guidance that addresses an action or an attitude that needs to change.

When you teach your child to accept correction, both of you are spared much grief. “If children are always rescued from their errors,” says a father named John, “they will never learn. They will jump from one problem to the next, and you will spend your life following them, stomping out the fires that they cause. That makes life miserable for the parents *and* the child.”

How can you help your child benefit from constructive criticism? When your child receives it—whether at school or anywhere else—resist the urge to say that the correction is unfair. Instead, you could ask:

- “Why do you think the correction was given?”
- “How can you improve?”
- “What will you do the next time you are in this situation?”

Remember, constructive criticism will serve your child well, not only now but also in adulthood.

* See the article “Help Your Child Cope With Grief,” in the July 1, 2008, issue of *The Watchtower*.

Teach by Example

- Do I admit my mistakes, or do I blame others?
- Do I talk about my failures and what I learned from them?
- Do I ridicule others for their mistakes?

What We Did . . .

“We did not protect our children from every challenge, failure, or mistake. When I was young, enduring those things made me a better person. I feel that both of our children grew up to be balanced, well-adjusted adults because they were not pampered.”—**Jeff**.

“When my wife and I made mistakes with our children, we would always apologize. I believe that parents should share their own mistakes, setbacks, and errors with their children to emphasize that it’s just part of life.”—**James**.

LESSON 4

HOW TO BE RESPONSIBLE

WHAT DOES BEING RESPONSIBLE INVOLVE?

People who are responsible are reliable. They follow through on assigned tasks and complete them on time.

Even with their limited capabilities, very young children can start learning to be responsible. “A child’s capacity to cooperate begins by fifteen months, and his desire to start willingly pitching in starts at around eighteen months,” says the book *Parenting Without Borders*. “In many cultures parents begin to hone their children’s helpfulness especially between the ages of five and seven, and children this young competently assist in many domestic tasks.”

WHY IS BEING RESPONSIBLE IMPORTANT?

The term “boomerang generation” describes young adults who leave home and try to live on their own but fall on hard times and return to Mom and Dad. In some cases, this happens because the youth has never been taught to manage money, run a household, or live up to daily responsibilities.

Therefore, it is best if you train your children for the responsibilities of adulthood. “You don’t want to keep them dependent upon you until they turn eighteen and then dump them out into the real world,” says the book *How to Raise an Adult*.

HOW TO TEACH RESPONSIBILITY

Assign chores.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “There is benefit in every kind of hard work.”—Proverbs 14:23.

Young children are eager to work alongside their parents. You can take advantage of this natural



TRAIN NOW

Children who are taught to be responsible will be able to manage their life more effectively as adults

inclination by assigning your children chores around the home.

Some parents are reluctant to do that. They reason that their school-age children face a mountain of homework each day, so why add to their burden?

However, children who do chores are more likely to succeed at school, since chores teach them to accept assignments and complete tasks. Besides, notes the book *Parenting Without Borders*, “when we ignore our children’s eagerness to participate when they are younger, they internalize the idea that contributing is unimportant . . . They also begin to expect that things will be done for them.”

As that quote indicates, doing chores trains children to be contributors rather than consumers, givers rather than takers. Chores help children realize that they have a valued place in the family—and a responsibility toward it.

Help your children take responsibility for their mistakes.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Listen to counsel and accept discipline, in order to become wise in your future.”
—Proverbs 19:20.

When your children make mistakes—for example, if your son or daughter accidentally damages another person’s property—resist the urge to cover up what happened. Children can accept the consequences—in this case, apologizing and perhaps even making restitution.

Owning up to mistakes and failures will teach your children

- to be honest and admit their errors
- to avoid blaming others
- to avoid making excuses
- to apologize, when appropriate

THE BENEFITS OF CONSEQUENCES

“Children make mistakes, and when they do, it’s vital that parents remember that the educational benefits of consequences are a gift,” writes educator Jessica Lahey in the *Atlantic* magazine. “Year after year, my ‘best’ students—the ones who are happiest and successful in their lives—are the students who were allowed to fail, held responsible for missteps, and challenged to be the best people they could be in the face of their mistakes.”

Teach by Example

- Am I industrious, organized, and punctual?
- Do my children see me working around the home?
- Do I acknowledge my mistakes, even apologizing when necessary?

What We Did . . .

“If I was making dinner, the children helped from a very young age. If I was folding laundry, they folded some too. If I was dusting, they dusted. Work became fun for them. They were happy just to be with me, doing what I was doing. That’s how they learned to be responsible.”

—Laura.

“Once, I had our young son call a family friend and tell her he was sorry for being rude. Over the years he’s had to apologize on numerous occasions for saying honest but unkind things, but now he has learned to apologize freely when he makes a mistake.”—Debra.

LESSON 5

THE VALUE OF ADULT GUIDANCE

WHAT DOES ADULT GUIDANCE INVOLVE?

Children need adults in their life who can provide leadership and advice. As a parent, you are in the best position to fulfill that role; in fact, it is your duty. However, other adults can be mentors to your children as well.

WHY IS ADULT GUIDANCE IMPORTANT?

In many lands, young people have little interaction with adults. Consider this:

- Children spend much of their day at school, where students outnumber teachers and other adults.
- After school, some youths return to a home that is empty because both parents have to work.
- One study found that in the United States, children between 8 and 12 years of age spend an average of about six hours on entertainment media each day.*

The book *Hold On to Your Kids* says: “Young people are turning for instruction, modeling, and guidance not to mothers, fathers, teachers, and other responsible adults but to . . . their own peers.”

HOW TO PROVIDE GUIDANCE

Spend time with your children.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Train a child in the way he should go; even when he grows old he will not depart from it.”—Proverbs 22:6, footnote.

* The study found that on average, teenagers spend nearly nine hours per day on entertainment media. These statistics for young children and teenagers do not include time spent online at school or doing homework.



TRAIN NOW

A child who looks to adults for guidance is more likely to display wisdom and maturity later in life

Children naturally look to their parents for guidance. In fact, experts say that even as children enter the teen years, they tend to value the advice of their parents over that of their peers. “Parents remain the major influence on their child’s attitudes and behavior through adolescence and into young adulthood,” writes Dr. Laurence Steinberg in the book *You and Your Adolescent*. He adds: “Adolescents care what you think and listen to what you say, even if they don’t always admit it or agree with every point.”

Take advantage of your children’s natural inclination to look up to you. Spend time with your children and share your viewpoints, values, and experiences with them.

Provide a mentor.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “The one walking with the wise will become wise.”—Proverbs 13:20.

Can you think of an adult who might be a good role model for your adolescent? Why not arrange for that person to spend time with him or her? Of course, you should not abdicate your parental authority. But the encouragement from a trusted adult who you know will not harm your child can supplement the training you provide. In the Bible, Timothy—even as an adult—benefited greatly from the association he had with the apostle Paul, and Paul benefited from Timothy’s companionship.—Philippians 2:20, 22.

During the past century, many families have become somewhat fragmented, as grandparents, uncles, aunts, and other relatives may live in another part of the world. If that is true in your case, try to provide your teens with opportunities to learn from adults who have traits that you would like to see in your children.

SPENDING TIME WITH ADULTS

“My children have grown up around a diverse group of adults, and this has helped them to see life through other people’s experiences. For example, they were amazed when my grandmother told them that when she was a little girl, her family was the first one to get an electric light. She told them that people from surrounding areas came to their house just to stand in the kitchen and watch the light being turned on and off. That story made my children see how different life used to be. Learning about their great-grandmother in this way also helped them to have respect for her and for other older ones. When children spend more time with adults—and less with their peers—they are able to see life from a different perspective.”—Maranda.

Teach by Example

- Am I a good role model for my children?
- Do I show my children that I too look up to those with greater experience as mentors?
- Do I demonstrate that my children are important to me by spending time with them?

What We Did . . .

“Sometimes when I am in the middle of something, my daughter will say she wants to talk. I always make sure that she is a priority, even if I have to tell her to wait a few minutes so that she can have my undivided attention. My wife and I also strive to set a good example so she will see that we live by the same principles we are teaching her.”—David.

“When our daughter was born, my husband and I decided that I would not work but would stay home to help raise her. I do not regret that decision. It is very important to do as much as possible to be present in a child’s life so that he or she will have proper guidance and direction. More important, being there shows your child that you care.”—Lisa.

LESSON 6

THE NEED FOR MORAL VALUES

WHAT ARE MORAL VALUES?

People with moral values have a clear sense of right and wrong. Their moral code is not based on how they feel at the moment. Rather, it is founded on a firm set of principles that act as a guide for conduct—even when others are not watching.

WHY ARE MORAL VALUES IMPORTANT?

Children are bombarded with distorted messages about morals, whether from the people they go to school with, the music they listen to, or the movies and TV shows they watch. Such influences can challenge their beliefs about what is right and what is wrong.

That is especially true during the teen years. By that time, says the book *Beyond the Big Talk*, they “need to understand the intense peer and media pressures to be popular and accepted, and they need to learn to make decisions consistent with their own values and choices, even if that means going against their friends.” Clearly, training needs to begin *before* adolescence.

HOW TO TEACH MORAL VALUES

Establish a moral code.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Mature people . . . have their powers of discernment trained to distinguish both right and wrong.”—Hebrews 5:14.

- **Build a moral vocabulary.** Point to everyday situations and highlight contrasts: “This is honest; that is dishonest.” “This is loyal; that is disloyal.” “This is kind; that is unkind.” In time, your child will connect moral values with actions.
- **Explain the reasons for your moral code.** For example, ask questions such as: Why is honesty the best policy? How can lying damage



TRAIN NOW

Children who see their parents display honesty are more likely to resist temptations to be dishonest when on their own

friendships? Why is stealing wrong? Appeal to your child’s developing conscience and sense of logic.

- **Emphasize the benefits of adhering to good morals.** You could say: “If you are honest, others will trust you” or “If you are kind, people will like being around you.”

Make your moral code part of your family identity.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Keep proving what you yourselves are.”—2 Corinthians 13:5.

- Your moral code should be part of your family, so that you can truthfully say:

“In our family we do not lie.”

“We do not hit others or scream at them.”

“We do not approve of abusive speech.”

Your child will see that moral values are not mere rules to follow but that they make up the family’s identity.

- Frequently discuss your family values with your child. Use everyday situations as object lessons. You could compare your values with those presented in the media or in school. Ask your child questions like: “What would you have done?” “How would our family have handled this?”

Reinforce moral values.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Maintain a good conscience.”

—1 Peter 3:16.

- **Commend good behavior.** If your child displays good moral values in what he does, praise him for it and explain why. For example, you could say: “You were honest. I am proud of you.” If your child confesses to having done something wrong, sincerely commend him for his honesty before you correct him.
- **Correct bad behavior.** Help your children accept responsibility for their actions. Children should know *what* they did wrong and *how* their conduct deviates from the family’s value system. Some parents are reluctant to make their child ‘feel bad’ about misbehavior, but discussing bad behavior with your child this way will help him develop a conscience that is sensitive to right and wrong.



For more information about parenting,
go to jw.org, or scan code.

Teach by Example

- Do my children see in my actions and words that I live by the values that our family has adopted?
- Do my spouse and I promote the same values?
- Do I justify ignoring my moral code by saying or thinking, “This is OK for adults”?

What We Did . . .

“We used the experiences of others to show the benefits of good morals and compared the results they had with those of people who made unwise decisions. When our children told us about a peer who made a poor choice, we discussed it with them so that they would not go down the same path.”—Nicole.

“When our daughter was very young, we would tell her that she had two choices—one good and the other bad—and we outlined the consequences of each. From this, she learned to make decisions. It was a vital lesson, since life is all about choices, no matter how old we are.”—Yolanda.



MORE HELP FOR PARENTS

As you might have noticed, the advice found in this magazine is based on the Bible. The Bible contains the best guidance for sound living for each member of the family. Its principles can improve a person's thinking ability and sound judgment.—Proverbs 1:1-4.

THE BIBLE ALSO ANSWERS LIFE'S BIG QUESTIONS, SUCH AS:

- What is the meaning of life?
- Is God to blame for our suffering?
- What happens when we die?



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