

Taking Accountability: It's Easy Right?

From the day we were born we had expectations placed on us as individuals, both boys and girls. Although those expectations may have been different, and different roles were defined for us depending on our gender, one thing remained true; we needed to be responsible for our own behavior. From an early age we are taught what it means to be accountable and hopefully how to take accountability.

When we are children we are taught to be accountable for many basic things, such as picking up our room, picking up our toys, being kind to others, etc. For the most part if we do not follow through with the things we are taught, then there are consequences for our actions.

This continues throughout the rest of our lives into our teenage years, and then most importantly into adulthood. We all have responsibilities, and if we do not follow through with those responsibilities, we get a bad grade, get grounded, fail a class, or possibly even more life changing like getting fired or go to jail. This obviously could impact our life significantly depending on what situation you are in, which is why many people try to avoid these issues by lying or making excuses. Taking accountability for an action, especially a negative action, is not an easy thing to do, but the earlier you learn to do this the easier and more successful your life can be because of it.

Often times, at an early age, we learn that blaming others or making excuses for our actions will get us out of trouble or at least minimize the amount of trouble we are in, in the first place. Blaming and making excuses is a natural behavior, but it is a very destructive behavior at the same time due to the fact that all the while you are doing it you are creating a bad habit of deflecting responsibility as well.

The other bad habit children often pick up at an early age is lying, which all it takes is one or two times for a child to get away with it and this behavior can be hard to break. If we think about it, the reason we lie is we do not want to live up to the bad choices that we made, so we make up a better choice or a more exciting story to sound more excusable. Again, the problem with this is we are creating a very bad habit for adulthood of not taking accountability for own actions.

In my work with elementary students, I feel that teaching accountability is an absolute need in order for them to be successful adults. Don't get me wrong, most children understand what it means to be responsible and many of the students that I work with are very responsible, but taking accountability by saying very direct statements, looking right at the person, not backing down, and not making excuses is not easy for a younger child or any youth for that matter. This is a skill that needs to be taught and can be taught.

Children, who are courageous enough to stand up for the right thing, take the consequences, and learn from those consequences, are the children that grow up to be successful adults. They are able to understand that the choices that they are making are impacting their lives in a negative way and that they need to change things in order to be a better person. If you think about it, if we struggle with accepting responsibility and accepting consequences as children, how do you think we will behave as adults?

In my work with adults, working with domestic violence perpetrators, accountability tends to be the one area that many men struggle with most. Men tend to blame many of their issues on their partner, the justice system, or even that it was the way they were brought up. Many things may contribute to the fact that we may make choices in life, but the truth of the matter is that we make choices ourselves and we need to live up to them. We can't make excuses for why we made them because in that moment you decided to make that choice, and if it put you in a bad spot, then you need to live up to the consequences. If you were in a good spot, would you make excuses to get out of a good situation? No, you would take accountability for that behavior 100 times out of 100, because that is easy to accept. We need to learn to do this when things are difficult just as we do when things are easy.

The important part to remember about accountability, and I tell all my students this, before they make decisions, ask yourself, is this something you or someone you look up to would be proud of? If the answer to that question is no, then you need to reconsider your decision. The second most important part to taking accountability is don't make excuses or blame others for your actions. Your choices are your choices; live by them and face the music if you made a bad choice. If you do something, be courageous enough to take responsibility for it. If you can master these two things, then you have accountability mastered.

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