

7 to 8

Ready for More

How to help them earn more privileges through responsibility
 BY MICHELLE ANTHONY, M.A., Ph.D.

FIRST AND second graders are brimming with an increased sense of confidence and competence. They're not "little kids" anymore, and they're clamoring for new opportunities: to take charge of feeding the pets, to stay up later, to walk to the school bus alone. As eager as you may be for your child to spread his wings and take flight, it's natural for you to hesitate and wonder, "What kinds of responsibilities are right for my child?"

INDEPENDENCE GROWS

The start of the school year is the perfect time to let your child take on a few new household duties. It can encourage her budding independence and, though you may not realize it, make the relationship you share even stronger. (Bonus: It can lighten your workload around the house, too!)

Open the lines of communication. Listen to what matters to your child and to what he's hoping to be able to do. While we don't recommend jumping every time you hear the words, "All my friends get to do this," you will want to pay attention to what your child is saying. Doing so will encourage him to feel he can come to you with needs, wants, and worries. When your child advances in maturity, it can be a chance for the parent-child relationship to benefit, but it can also cause the relationship to suffer if you and your child don't check in with each other to talk about your feelings.



tips

SET tangible goals. For example, decide together on how many days in a row your child needs to get himself ready for school in order to demonstrate he is responsible enough to have more sleepovers.

PROVIDE support and training to ensure success when introducing a new duty. Break a larger job into smaller, more identifiable tasks.

Link independence to new responsibilities. Choose a quiet time to talk with your child about the opportunities she's seeking. Let her know that you're happy to support her in becoming more independent as long as she demonstrates her ability to follow through on related responsibilities. For instance, if your child wants to be the one who feeds and walks the dog, explain that you'll know she's ready for that level of responsibility when she shows she can keep the house plants well watered and cared for. Your child will be more motivated to take on increased responsibility if she feels she benefits from doing so. She'll also understand that privileges come with obligations. **P&C**

MICHELLE ANTHONY, M.A., Ph.D., is co-author of *Little Girls Can Be Mean: Four Steps to Bullyproof Girls in the Early Grades*. She is an expert in developmental psychology and a certified K-3 teacher.