

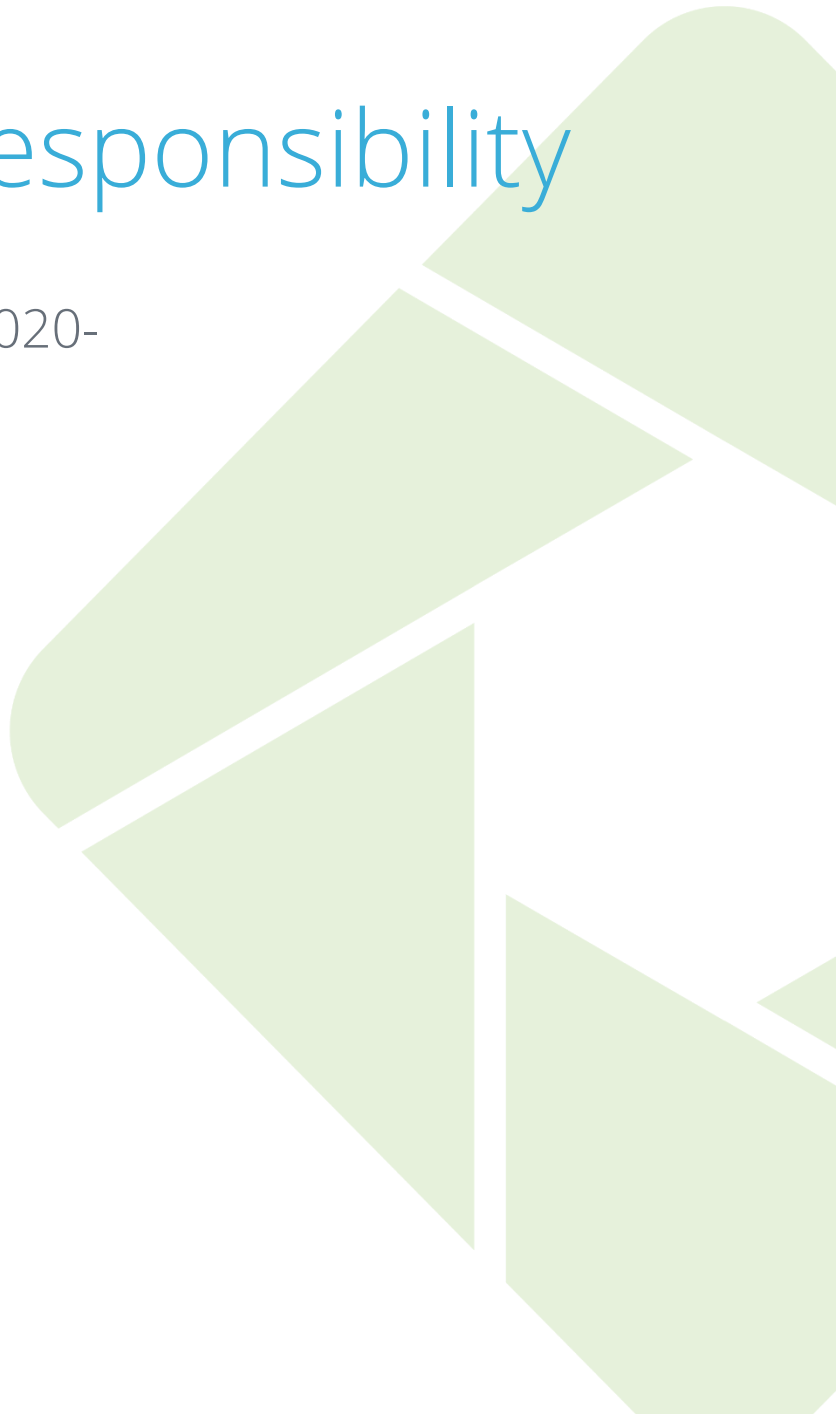


APERTURE EDUCATION

STRATEGIES GUIDE:

Personal Responsibility

-2020-



Personal Responsibility

A child's tendency to be careful and reliable in their actions and in contributing to group efforts.

What is Personal Responsibility?

Personal Responsibility is a child's tendency to be careful and reliable in their actions and in contributing to group efforts. Children who demonstrate Personal Responsibility will understand expectations; appear conscientious; be on task, dependable and helpful; and may serve as role models for their peers. For example, a child who is asked to take out the trash every week (an important role at home) and accomplishes this task each week (a careful and reliable action), is showing Personal Responsibility. This may be one task on a list of chores for the family each week, indicating the child's regular contribution to the efforts of a group.

A number of concepts and terms are similar to the construct of Personal Responsibility but are not identical. A person might say a child has an internal locus of control, autonomy, industry, conscientiousness, self-reliance, self-discipline, or self-determination. When these terms are used outside of this resource, they may refer to aspects of Personal Responsibility or to competencies that require some of the same skills that a child must apply to act in a personally responsible way. However, they should not be taken as synonymous with the Personal Responsibility scale on the DESSA.

Personal Responsibility may seem to overlap with other social-emotional competencies on the DESSA such as Goal-Directed Behavior, Self-Management, and Decision Making. In fact, the Collaborative for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning (CASEL) does not separate Personal Responsibility from Decision Making, but rather includes a combined construct of "Responsible Decision Making," which is defined as "the ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others" (CASEL, 2012). The authors of the DESSA have separated the concepts of Personal Responsibility and Decision Making for simplicity, so that adults can more easily observe and develop these skills in children and youth. In the DESSA

and accompanying strategies, Personal Responsibility items reflect careful and reliable behaviors and contributions to group efforts, while the construct of Decision Making emphasizes problem solving and making positive choices.

The DESSA for grades kindergarten through 8 (DESSA K-8) and DESSA-High School Edition for grades 9-12 (DESSA-HSE) measure Personal Responsibility with the following items.

DESSA K-8	DESSA-HSE
1. remember important information	1. remember important information?
4. handle his/her belongings with care	3. serve an important role at home or school?
6. serve an important role at home or school	13. encourage positive behaviors in others?
20. encourage positive behavior in others	14. prepare for school, activities, or upcoming events?
21. prepare for school, activities, or upcoming events	18. get things done in a timely fashion?
23. do routine tasks or chores without being reminded	21. work carefully on projects or schoolwork?
24. act as a leader in a peer group	
28. get things done in a timely fashion	
32. show care when doing a project or schoolwork	
35. follow rules	

While all items on the DESSA Personal Responsibility scale indicate responsible, conscientious, and constructive behaviors, items 1, 4, 21, 23, 28, and 32 (DESSA K-8) and items 1, 14, 18, and 21 (DESSA-HSE) specifically indicate *careful and reliable behaviors* whereas items 6, 20, 24 and 35 (DESSA K-8) and items 3 and 13 (DESSA-HSE) represent *contributions to group efforts*.

The Different Aspects of Personal Responsibility

As you use the Personal Responsibility strategies, you'll notice that they may focus on one or more aspects of the competency. As mentioned above, we have identified two distinct facets of Personal Responsibility: *engaging in careful and reliable behaviors* and *making contributions to group efforts*.

CAREFUL AND RELIABLE BEHAVIORS

Careful and reliable behaviors are everyday acts that help children operate smoothly in their various environments without exhibiting behavioral problems or creating conflicts with teachers and peers. Getting things done, such as homework and chores in a timely fashion, preparing for upcoming events, following through on agreements and remembering important information all

represent careful and reliable behaviors. These behaviors require consistency and conscientiousness, which can take time for children to cultivate. However, developing the ability to conduct oneself and perform tasks in a careful and reliable way will benefit children now and into the future.

CONTRIBUTION TO GROUP EFFORTS

A second component of Personal Responsibility is *contribution to group efforts*. This includes both the skills for leadership and the ability to step back and be a participating member in a group. Leadership skills, like all other social-emotional skills, can and must be thoughtfully and intentionally fostered in all students (Kress, 2006). As leaders, students serve as role models for other students, and encourage positive behavior in others. However, authentic youth leaders develop not through the imposition of adult agendas, but through engaging with objectives or goals that are relevant and meaningful to youth themselves (Kress, 2006).

Adults often envision student leaders as serving as captains on teams and in student government; however, youth leaders come in a variety of forms. Leadership may be observed as daily, quiet work behind the scenes that supports others and models expectations. This type of leadership is recognized through following rules and serving an important role at home or school. Leaders also come from every cultural, socioeconomic, and academic circumstance (Kress, 2006).

Students must be able to move between acting as leaders and supporting others in the leadership role in order to positively and consistently contribute to groups. When others are in the leadership role, personally responsible students respectfully participate in the group, follow through on agreements, and complete tasks as needed in a thoughtful and timely manner. The ability to be a participating member is equally, if not more important than the ability to exert influence through a formal or informal leadership role.

The Development and Importance of Personal Responsibility

As children grow older, increasing demands are placed on them at home and school such as waking themselves up in the morning, remembering to complete assignments, and caring for siblings or pets without direct adult supervision. Parents and teachers often help young children perform these types of tasks. However, as children grow older, adults begin to hand over the reins, offering increasing responsibility to the youth themselves. Children must become responsible for

independently completing tasks and chores - they must rely progressively more on themselves than on others (Willis, 1998).

As students grow in self-reliance and autonomy, they realize they can use their own strengths to help themselves and others accomplish tasks. They begin to feel powerful and see themselves as important participants in their school and community (Kress, 2006). As children begin to rely increasingly on themselves, others will begin to rely on them, too. This dynamic enables those around them to view them differently and treat them accordingly. Therefore, parents, teachers, and other child-serving professionals must view Personal Responsibility as a key tool in the toolbox of social-emotional skills that all children, adolescents, and adults alike must have in order to effectively navigate their environments.

DEVELOPING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

As with all social-emotional skills, developing children's sense of Personal Responsibility is rooted in relationships with caring, attentive adults who model clear, consistent, and positive behaviors (Bandura, 1971; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Kress, 2006). In addition to modeling and demonstrating Personal Responsibility, adults can create an environment that unambiguously encourages personally responsible behavior in children and youth (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Kress, 2006). For example, providing explicit and consistent expectations and stable routines helps children and youth understand their role and predict behavioral transitions (ED, 2005; Jones and Bouffard, 2012; Wentzel, 1991). The items on the DESSA (i.e., "do routine tasks or chores without being reminded" and "get things done in a timely fashion") refer to observable behaviors and can be used to aid adults in identifying and clarifying social and emotional expectations. When youth are aware of, and clearly understand the behaviors adults hope to observe, they can monitor their own conduct and make efforts towards behavioral improvement (Bradshaw, Mitchell & Leaf, 2010).

However, children can only improve behavior and develop social and emotional skills when an abundance of safe and engaging opportunities are provided for youth to practice and demonstrate their abilities (CREDE, 2003; Kress, 2006). To provide children and youth with opportunities to demonstrate Personal Responsibility, adults must be willing to trust them with tasks and activities that require autonomy, care, and reliability (Eccles, 1999; Kress, 2006; Rowe, 2006). These might be household chores, such as feeding the dog, or school projects that require effort and challenge the

student's abilities. Developmentally appropriate tasks that balance challenge with high opportunities for success must be scaffolded by adults, keeping in mind that children grow and develop at different rates (Dahl, 2004; Eccles, 1999; Kress, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). While the Personal Responsibility strategies are presented incrementally for the primary, intermediate, and middle school grades, it is important as an adult to be mindful of each student's unique developmental level. Age, maturity, life events and other personal and social factors have important influences on the confidence and abilities of youth to take on new roles.

Developing Personal Responsibility does not end with the provision of appropriate and meaningful opportunities for skill demonstration and practice. The demonstration of learned skills should be followed by genuine reinforcement, such as specific praise and recognition from adults and peers (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). If reinforcement and feedback are provided in non-judgmental ways that help students feel supported, students will feel a greater connection to the source of reinforcement (adults, peers, school, and out-of-school time program). This increases the chance that a child will further buy into the behavioral expectations set forth and make ongoing efforts to internalize skills and values that will lead to long-term positive changes (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Rowe, 2006). Furthermore, it is important that adults consistently model Personal Responsibility by "thinking out loud" when discussing agreements, following through or renegotiating if adjustments are needed.

The Benefits of Personal Responsibility

Personal Responsibility, like all social-emotional competencies, is necessary for success in all areas of children's lives. With this in mind, the DESSA Growth Strategies were written to include activities for developing children's social and emotional skills in the home, at school, and in the out-of-school time program. The benefits of Personal Responsibility can be observed across these environments and contribute to student success at present and in the future.

IN THE HOME

Personally responsible children are likely to be helpful family members and may contribute to a more peaceful home environment. When children possess the skills of Personal Responsibility, parents may need to spend less time disciplining and may notice children modeling appropriate

behavior for siblings and helping others learn. In fact, conscientious individuals, who exhibit many skills of Personal Responsibility, are more likely than individuals lacking these skills to avoid unnecessary interpersonal conflict and resolve conflicts that do occur (Duckworth, Weir, Tsukayama & Kowk, 2012). At home, personally responsible children handle their belongings with care; serve an important role in their environment; encourage positive behavior in others; prepare for school, activities, or upcoming events; do routine tasks or chores without being reminded; get things done in a timely fashion; and follow household rules or expectations. Research has suggested that children who have skills related to Personal Responsibility are likely to spend more time on homework, less time watching television, and are likely to start their homework earlier in the day (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). Furthermore, the skills for Personal Responsibility learned and practiced at home are likely to influence behavior at school, contributing to the development of relationships with adults and peers at school as well as success in other academic endeavors (Wentzel, 1991).

IN THE SCHOOL OR OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAM

Personally responsible children contribute to peaceful, smoothly run classrooms and program settings. Teachers and out-of-school time professionals with personally responsible students will likely spend less time on behavior management and increased time on subject matter and planned activities because children who are personally responsible remember important information, do routine tasks without being reminded, get things done in a timely fashion, and know and follow the agreed upon rules. These behaviors influence student relationships with teachers and adults and can contribute to fewer office discipline referrals and suspensions (Bradshaw, Mitchell & Leaf, 2010; Luiselli, Putnam, Handler & Beinberg, 2005; Wentzel, 1991).

Children and adolescents with Personal Responsibility also have more pro-social skills, a sense of belonging, and feelings of hopefulness compared to their less personally responsible peers (Walsh, 2007). They will support each other in learning, encourage positive behavior in others, serve an important role, and act as leaders in peer groups. Furthermore, these students possess the ability and patience to handle their belongings with care, and show thoughtfulness and follow-through when doing a project or schoolwork. These behaviors may contribute to a more positive classroom or program environment where students take ownership of their learning.

The personally responsible behaviors and their respective effects listed above can lead to greater academic achievement for students (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Wentzel, 1991). A study by Duckworth and Seligman observed that adolescents exhibiting skills of Personal Responsibility (self-discipline) outperformed their more impulsive peers on report-card grades, standardized achievement test scores, admission to competitive high schools, and attendance. The authors also found that Personal Responsibility may lead to gains in academic performance over the school year (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

IN THE FUTURE

Identifying and supporting a child's social-emotional strengths and needs may not only affect the child during youth but can follow the child into adulthood. Children who are personally responsible possess the skills to help them grow into adults who are empowered, reliable, healthy and contributing citizens and family members. As children venture into adulthood, living more independent lives, the skills of Personal Responsibility become increasingly important. As adults, these youth will compose our workforce, our citizenry, and our caregivers for families and children.

The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 1999) identify several characteristics outside of academic and technical knowledge and skills that are necessary for career readiness and employability. A number of these skills fall into the realm of Personal Responsibility including the ability to exercise leadership, to work independently and productively in teams, to act responsibly and with social responsibility, to use clear and effective communication skills, and to demonstrate integrity and honesty.

Accordingly, personally responsible individuals also tend to perform better in the workplace. They are likely to work hard, complete tasks thoroughly, stay organized, act responsibly, and make decisions carefully, exhibiting greater productivity than their less conscientious co-workers (Duckworth, Weir, Tsukayama & Kwok, 2012; Moffitt et al., 2011). In contrast, lack of Personal Responsibility could impact an individual's ability to find and keep a job (Moffitt et al., 2011). Consequently, the skills of Personal Responsibility can lead to greater financial stability (Moffitt et al., 2011). Studies show that skills related to Personal Responsibility were related to income, savings behavior, financial security, and occupational prestige in adulthood (Moffitt et al. 2011; Duckworth, Weir, Tsukayama & Kwok, 2012).

Personal Responsibility is often considered an important and valuable character trait of good citizens, neighbors, and community members lending values of helpfulness, integrity, hard work, and trust (Westheimer & Kahne, 2013; ED, 2005). Teaching children to contribute to smaller groups in their daily lives may encourage commitment to larger communities as adults. This could lead to involvement in community efforts such as community service activities and voting.

Personally responsible individuals may even experience more positive personal lives than their counterparts. Research has suggested that individuals who are conscientious are more satisfied with their lives and experience more positive and less negative emotion (Duckworth et al. 2012), and that skills related to Personal Responsibility contribute to positive interpersonal experiences including the development and maintenance of friendships and romantic relationships (Moffitt et al., 2011; Duckworth, Weir, Tsukayama & Kwok, 2012). Furthermore, the skills of Personal Responsibility can lead to improved physical and mental health, as well as reduced substance use and criminal convictions (Moffitt et al., 2011; Duckworth, Weir, Tsukayama & Kwok, 2012).

As described above, promoting Personal Responsibility can be essential to the short-term and long-term success and happiness of children. As adults in the lives of children and youth, we can use every interaction we have with a child to develop social-emotional skills like Personal Responsibility – we just need to interact with children with awareness and purpose. The strategies in this guide are merely a jumping off point for interacting with children with a refreshed mindset. The skills that you build through this work will serve children for now and forever.

Personal Responsibility Reflection Questions

We encourage you to explore this social-emotional competency in more depth by reflecting on the following questions:

- How do you see this competency providing opportunities for growth in your educational setting?
- What aspects of this competency would you like to learn more about?
- What do you see as the biggest challenges for building this competency in your students?

This guide does not represent a comprehensive literature review, but a foundation for exploring the strategies found in the DESSA Comprehensive SEL System. Please feel free to use the references below to further explore the construct Personal Responsibility.

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