

Interest-based Learning: Giving Children Responsibilities

Narrator: Welcome to this short presentation on giving children responsibilities. The presentation will highlight the ways that teachers can help young children become more engaged in classroom activities and routines by giving children more responsibilities. Giving children responsibilities contributes to children's social and emotional development and learning. By giving children meaningful responsibilities and roles in the classroom, we can help children feel good about themselves and help them feel more confident about their abilities.

The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning uses a house framework to illustrate the four components of teaching and learning that support school readiness for all children. All four components interact with each other. In this presentation, we focus on the foundation of the house: Engaging Interactions and Environments. And we'll focus even more closely on social and emotional support, one part of the foundation.

Teachers and classrooms that provide children with responsibilities promote prosocial behaviors. Responsibilities that encourage children to work together also promote cooperation, sharing, and caring behaviors toward others in the classroom community. These are teaching practices that benefit everyone.

What does giving children responsibilities mean, and what does it look like in the classroom? Giving children responsibilities means that teachers plan for and offer children opportunities to be valued members of their classroom by taking on jobs and tasks that contribute to the well-being of everyone in the classroom. Children are involved in meaningful ways in the daily life of the classroom. It makes the classroom run better and just makes it a better and more pleasant place to be.

Let's learn about three strategies for giving children responsibilities: 1) offer meaningful roles, 2) let children lead, 3) encourage children to help each other. One way that teachers let children take on greater responsibility is to offer them meaningful roles or jobs. We've all heard of the line leader, the weather monitor, and the attendance taker.

There are lots of other ways – sometimes very clever ways – that teachers help children be valued members of the classroom. The teacher might ask children to pitch in, for example, when the teacher says, "I need someone to collect the musical instruments so we can take them next door." Or the teacher notices that the book corner is disorganized and says, "Our library has gotten so messy that it's hard to find our favorite books. Can you help organize our books?"

Many routine activities lend themselves to jobs that need to be done on a regular basis, such as passing out the napkins at snack time or sweeping up the sand from around the sensory table. Make these important jobs and let the children contribute. Let's look at examples of children taking on meaningful roles in their classrooms.

[Video begins] Boy: I– I'm the toothbrush putter away.

Boy: I'm the drummer.

Teacher: You can be in charge of the dinosaurs. You're the dinosaur guy. So you can put all the dinosaurs away, okay? There you go, Ronnie. You're doing it. [Video ends]

Narrator: Another way that teachers provide children with opportunities to assume responsibilities is to let children lead the class when appropriate. Leadership opportunities allow children to feel more confident and competent. These sorts of opportunities create an environment where children feel safe to initiate and take responsibility. Children might lead part of a lesson or activity. Let's take a look at what this looks like in the classroom.

[Video begins] Teacher: Doctor Kiera! Doctor, doctor.

Kiera: Yes?

Teacher: Leah is feeling very sick.

Kiera: Okay.

Boy: Let's start all the way at the beginning. ♪ The wheels on the bus go round and round. ♪

Boy: Seimente.

Children: Seimente.

Boy: Ziatenge.

Children: Ziatenge.

Boy: Assire.

Children: Assire. [Video ends]

Narrator: Teachers can also provide children with opportunities for greater responsibility by encouraging children to help each other. These opportunities help children learn cooperation, sharing, and caring. Children are learning empathy, the ability to identify with the feelings of others and to respond emotionally in a similar way. There are many ways that teachers encourage children to help others. They might suggest that a child invite another classmate to play or join a game. Teachers model how to give compliments and notice when the children give each other compliments.

Similarly, teachers model caring and comforting behaviors and they notice and affirm when children do the same with each other. Let's look at other examples of teachers encouraging children to help each other. Think about how these teaching practices contribute to children's social and emotional development.

[Video begins] Teacher 1: Good teamwork, working together. I like that.

Teacher 2: Baby, wash right here. Oh, you all are making that truck so nice and shiny. [Video ends]

Narrator: Teachers have a host of ways to give children responsibilities in the classroom. They offer meaningful roles and jobs, they let children lead, and they encourage children to help others. They can be used throughout the day and in a variety of activities and routines. These teaching practices help children learn prosocial behaviors and lead to more learning across all the curricular domains.

Thank you for listening. Learn more about giving children responsibilities by going to our larger module on this topic. Take a look at our tips and tools and use the resources to dig deeper and find out more about helping children be enthusiastic, caring, and responsible learners.