How to Build Character in your Children

Day 6:

**Personal Responsibility**  
By Carlos Santiago

Sometimes being a parent can feel like your job is to plug holes in a failing dam with your fingers. As soon as one leak is addressed, another pops up to take its place.

When our son was in the fourth grade, we had all but run out of fingers. Every day was a battle. He would forget to bring home his textbooks, forget to complete homework assignments, and even forget his lunch. It seemed no matter how many times we attempted to remind him, if it was important, he would forget.

At first, I saw his behavior as a blatant challenge to my authority. It made my blood boil. He just didn’t seem to care.

Eventually, his mother and I realized that his ambivalence made sense. He didn’t have a problem. We did. His life was easy. If he forgot a book, I would go online and try to find the reading material another way. If he forgot lunch or homework, his mother would drop what she was doing, drive to the school, and deliver it to him. With every act of irresponsible behavior, we would rescue him. He faced consequences of our anger, but not the actual effects of his behavior.

One day we sat him down and explained that we were going to stop shielding him.

The next week, he called from school to tell us that he had left his homework in the kitchen, and he wanted us to bring it to him. We knew his grades couldn’t afford the hit, but we refused anyway. The next day when he brought in his homework, his grade was reduced by 50 percent.

In the year that followed his grades were littered with missed assignments and partial credits. There were moments when he was in real danger of not moving to the next grade. It was hard to watch, but we understood that critical character development was at stake.

When my son finally realized that we weren’t bluffing, his behavior began to change. Today, the epic battles over schoolwork are gone. He still misses an assignment every now and then, but when he does, he knows it is his responsibility to have the uncomfortable conversation with his teachers to make up the work.

It was difficult for us to help him learn that lesson, but it would have been far more difficult had he not. The next time you are tempted to rescue your child from a bad decision, ask yourself, “What kind of consequences might this type of behavior generate in 15 years?” In real life, bosses don’t tolerate excuses, and police don’t give exceptions. Refusing to rescue may make life more difficult in the short term, but it will be worth it in the end.

**Scripture:**

Hebrews 12:11 No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.