

VALUABLE LESSONS

Parents shouldn't do it for you

By ANN ROSEN SPECTOR

NOW THAT THE new school-year is fully up and running, it's time to think about giving your students, whether they're on the local school bus or in college, the gift that keep on giving — independence and responsibility for themselves. A real education isn't just about three Rs, it's also about learning that we're all ultimately responsible for our own actions, and our own education.

We love our kids, we can teach and guide them, but we can't do it for them.

Life, including kindergarten, is not a consequence-free zone. The sooner children learn that lesson, the better they're going to be at getting along with others and setting and meeting their academic goals. It's not just a lesson for circle time; it's a lesson for school, work and the real world.

If it's a 5-year-old's job to remember his homework, then after some gentle reminders and some help in establishing a routine to get the homework done, and get the backpack ready for the next day, then if he forgets, it should be "his bad."

Parents shouldn't be late to work, or leave work, or someone drive to the school to get the homework there. If there's a consequence for no homework, then perhaps the next time he'll remember. But if there's no consequence, and the parents do the work for him, then what will the child have learned? It won't be "Do better next time," but "Someone else will clean up my mistakes."

And that's not a strategy for success.

As someone who's taught at a university for more than 25 years, I'm still surprised at how many students have truly lame-o excuses for failure to get quality work done on time.

OF COURSE, we've evolved from the "Dog ate my homework" stage to "My computer crashed/printer malfunctioned," but it's amazing how many students get parents to call and verify these alibis.

Or when students hand in truly substandard work, and are told so, they respond, "But I spent hours on it!" They are astounded when I tell them it's irrelevant; it's the product that matters.

When my oldest child started middle school, at a parent gathering in mid-October, a classmate's mother said to me, "Isn't it amazing how much more homework they have this year?" She almost

fainted when I responded, "They have much more homework?"

"How can you not know this?" the other mother said, astonished that I was clearly an unfit parent, for I had heretofore seemed so normal. "Well," I said, "I work until 7 — when I get home, both of my daughters have their homework done, we have dinner together, and read, or watch one TV show together."

"You don't sit down and do homework together?" By now there was a cluster of parents looking at me as if I were deranged. (I'm surprised they didn't call DHS.)

"No, I don't. It's her job to complete the work for fifth grade. I did it when I was 10. If she has trouble, I'm happy to be a resource,

but I'm not doing my job all day, and coming home and doing hers, too."

It's amazing that I wasn't tarred and feathered or ostracized from the PTA. I did, however, continue to be viewed as some bizarre species of parent.

Yet not only did my daughter graduate from high school and college with honors, she learned that it was her responsibility to do so. I wanted her, and her sister, to be responsible adults, so each year, I shifted the responsibility for all sorts of things from my plate to theirs.

And they not only survived, they thrived.

Far too many parents have no theory about why they do what they do and, if you have no idea what kind of adult you want to help create, you can't devise a good strategy for how to achieve that.

No one makes a cake without a recipe. You know whether you want a chocolate or a lemon cake before you assemble and measure the ingredients. Yet raising a child without a theory is like throwing any old item in your pantry into your cake bowl and hoping for the best.

In many cases, it's not just "a stage they're going through" — they are establishing a pattern of poor behaviors that will take lots of time and effort on the part of the responsible adults in their lives to help them correct.

And, I say, the earlier you start, the better. ★

Ann Rosen Spector is a psychologist in private practice in Center City and an adjunct faculty member at Rutgers-Camden.

By MARK FRANK

LAST SPRING students at take up teaching. During my sabbatical, I must have children for various rules.

I've witnessed right at home on for high-schoolers been around long people make stupid consequences, but they turn themselves into est citizens.

All of us have a school. Now that has started coming it's a good time to young adults is not always paid.

Making mistakes things are an intro. Learn from the consequences.

Now that I am a parent, I can admit that I am a troublemaker.

In ninth grade dad's Apple con-

dating this girl a senior prom, but t

There's a hard-looked lesson in all kinds of work. A lesson would be a lesson't true most o

If I had a child her: See that girl row, the one you dumb and ugly-headed my dad's to open doors for "ugly" girls. I might turn out to be a boss — or your (

When I was 2

DAILY NEWS 10/1/2007



we would have been
e some plays."
k added, "Osi, he's a
ayer. Winston hasn't
at all ... but we
ome things to
"

reason, most people
o the sigh-of-relief
word came down on
Westbrook had an
strain and not a rib
ey are people who
rience with abdomi-
n athletes.

bad injuries. They
etter, not all the way,
e offseason. They are
nd painful. You feel it
ou put your hand on
every time the quar-
s the ball in your gut,
ou breathe if the in-
cularly acute.

of football always
se. The tasks of
h as the foremen-
hing — often make it
an try to mask the
; only temporary and
se bravado that only
jury worse in the end.
e thing can be as
is persistent. The
e the right move
centage play, in hold-
stbrook last night.

time decision," Andy
bye week upon them,
can give him a full 20
; the injury between
opened (last Sunday
roit) and their next
14 against the New
If nothing else, they
themselves time to
proper novena.

l to play," said West-
is hopeful he can play
Jets. "It just didn't
eat way ... when
hysically healthy it's
play. You can't play.
didn't heal."
the right move. But it
otball game for them
l while we have all
r a while now, how
Westbrook is to this
now have a Technical-
tration of this fact.
Brian, McNabb is
blue. ★

ofmann@phillynews.com.
urns, go to
lly.com/hofmann.

ofmann@phillynews.com.
urns, go to
lly.com/hofmann.