

Pass It On - Guiding your child to develop new levels of responsibility

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Many cultures have celebrations for the rites of passage from childhood to adulthood. The Jewish tradition has coming of age ceremony of bar or bat mitzvah. For Hispanic girls, at age 15, the quinceanera marks the transition from childhood to being a woman. Growing up in the Mennonite church, I made the decision at age 14, with my parents' guidance and support, to be baptized as a member of the church and a follower of Jesus. On a family level, we too can be part of honoring and affirming our children's growth and development at different stages.

When kids are younger, it may be easier to celebrate with them when they move

from elementary to middle and high school, get a driver's license, enter puberty, or get their first job. We may give them a gift, host a party, and maybe include a ceremony as part of the celebration.

I am a firm believer in connecting new levels of privileges to being responsible. This assures that they can handle the challenges as well as knowing when to ask for help. For example, completing their chores without reminders, waking up on time on their own, and displaying respect, honesty and self-control in their relationships demonstrates they can be responsible with a new cell phone, later curfew, getting a driver's license and using the family car. I recommend a teen cell phone contract that encourages accountability with this new privilege. It can be adapted for other areas of new responsibility. joshshipp.com/teen-cell-phone-contract/

Guiding your child to develop new levels of responsibility may involve conversations, spelling out expectations, making a written contract with a time period and helping them gain the new skills needed (i.e., taking care of the family car, have more chores around the house that include shopping, preparing meals, making a budget, etc.) Of course, it is important to acknowledge and celebrate any new accomplishments.

I read about one family who celebrated their son's 18th birthday by not only inviting his friends but also people who had been important in supporting his journey. The family asked these people to prepare some wisdom or advice to share with him at the party. It was a moving and powerful evening of fun, celebration and blessing for all who attended.

If your children are already adults and you feel that you wish you had done more to celebrate their rites of passages, Jim Burns, author of "Doing Life With Your Adult Children" says it isn't too late. Here a few transitional times that he suggests you might use as an opportunity to celebrate.

- Starting college
- Taking a gap year to volunteer
- College graduation or completion of trade school
- Military enlistment
- First full-time job
- Job promotion or change
- Marriage
- Birth of a baby
- Buying a first home
- Special occasions with grandchildren, such as baptisms, dedications, and spiritual commitments. As a grandparent, you can make such rites of passage meaningful for your adult children as well as your grandchildren.

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